

Exploring the Mercury 13

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Process Paper Word Count: 499

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njMUfm5T-YU>

For the theme “Breaking Barriers,” we decided to go with the Mercury 13 women, focusing on Wally Funk and Rhea Wholtman. We knew the subject fit the theme because they were fighting barriers against sexism and what others felt they should do with their lives.

Wally Funk was the youngest of the Mercury 13 women. She convinced Randy Lovelace, the man who created the testing program, that she was old enough to be involved by reminding him that she’d already broken barriers and became first women flight instructor for a military base. Wally, Rhea, and Jerri Cobb took the test in a sensory deprivation tank that would see if they could mentally last in space. Wally set a record and beat John Glenn’s performance. However, after excelling at the 90 tests that the men took, NASA banned women from the program. The women may not have broken the barrier of space flight for women, but they inspired the women who did.

At first, we decided we’d do a documentary, but we both love acting so we picked a play. We also thought we could show the passion these women felt. We liked writing a script based on their story but using our own actions and ideas. We wanted to portray Wally and Rhea and how they influenced America. The best part of doing a performance is that we are the writers and the directors. If we want to change a script, we can. We can transform it into something extraordinary and still tell a historically accurate story.

Our research was from both primary and secondary sources, including books, websites, letters, and documentaries. Hopefully in the future, we can get to interview Wally Funk. The books we used were either timelines of space exploration, biographies about some of the pilots, articles written about the program, or background information on the women.

We began the process of creating our performance by researching to understand who the Mercury 13 Women were. We watched documentaries, both primary and secondary. We read dozens of books and articles. Then we wrote a rough script and edited it until we made it fit to our standards. The week before districts our school closed. We taped our performance live, because there weren’t any stay-at-home orders yet. Then the virus came closer; we stayed home. Every night we practiced with our teacher on face-time. We realized we couldn’t move around much, nor did we have all our props and makeup, but we made it work. We first taped a face-book performance, but it was not great quality, so we set up a zoom meeting. We figured out how to put ourselves face to face in the screen. We could see and react to each other and be emotionally together. Then we recorded the screen. At the end of our favorite take, the computer glitched, but sickness prevented re-taping. However, we weren’t unhappy with the results. we feel we conquered many barriers to do our project on breaking barriers

Annotated Bibliography

Primary:

Books:

Cobb, Jerrie. *Solo Pilot*. Sun City, Florida: Jerrie Cobb Foundation Inc., 1997.

Solo Pilot was written by the Mercury 13 pilot, Jerrie Cobb. She is mentioned quite a few times throughout our performance. We also used her book as a prop during those times. This book is about how Jerrie learned how to fly a bi-plane at twelve years old, flew bombers and fighters worldwide, elected the Woman of the Year in Aviation, is a test pilot and set four world records, first woman to pass NASA astronaut tests, and so much more, including her awards. Her autobiography is to inspire women to strive for the impossible.

Cobb, Jerrie and Jane Rieker. *Woman into Space*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.

This source gave us a great idea of what Jerrie Cobb accomplished, and it was a memoir about her. *Woman into Space* also was published in hopes to show that American women could fly. Little did she know, a few months after the story was published, Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman ever to go into space.

"Damp Prelude to Space." *Life*. October 24, 1960.

This magazine article explored the sensory deprivation test that Wally, Jerrie, and Rhea took. Wally broke the record. She was in the tank over 10 hours.

Steadman, Bernice Trimble and Jody M. Clark. *Tethered Mercury*. Aviation Press Traverse City, Michigan. 2001.

This book has many solid facts and examples. It was a memoir written by Bernice Steadman one of the 25 women invited to be an astronaut, and one of the thirteen that finished. She was a flight instructor and a racing pilot who tethered aviation and women together. *Tethered Mercury* included letters from the women to each other. It was overall a very good source.

Jessen, Gene Nora. *The Fabulous Flight of the Three Musketeers*. Meridian, Idaho: Sourcebooks Inc. 2009.

The Fabulous Flight of the Three Musketeers was written by Gene Nora Jessen, one of the women that was part of the Mercury 13 group. She wrote about how her and three other women in 1962 introduced their new Musketeer plane. They flew in a three airplane formation across the United States.

Luce, Clara Booth. "A Lady Proves She's Fit for Space Flight." *Life*. August 29, 1960.
We used this magazine in our performance. It contained a story about the Jerrie Cobb and brings in the other women who were known as FLATS, First Lady Astronaut Trainees. It helped us step back in time and understand what the Jerrie and other women went through. It also helped us understand the time periods. It was interesting to see all the silly cutesy women advertisement.

"The U.S. Team is Still Warming Up the Bench." *Life*. June 28, 1963.
This magazine article includes a scathing editorial against NASA and the US government for not allowing the Mercury 13 women continue the path toward space travel.

Documentary:

Mercury 13. Sington, David and Heather Walsh. 2018.
This documentary is a Primary source. The documentary includes some of the ladies from the Mercury 13 people and they explain what they went through, like tests and what everyone thought about them going for their dreams. It also had the women doing individual interviews. They also broke down what happened step by step. Including, all of the harassment and barriers it took to get close to their dreams.

Letters:

W. Randolph Lovelace, Letter to Mrs. Robert A Steadman, 1961.
This is a primary source. It is a direct letter from the founder of the Lovelace Program, to a woman who wanted to be an astronaut.

Jacqueline Cochran, Letter to Miss Bernice Steadman, 1961.
This letter is from Jacqueline Cochran, one of the best female pilots, to Miss Bernice Steadman. Cochran donated money to the Lovelace Program because she fully supported female astronauts until she didn't pass the tests and wasn't able to be an astronaut, so she agreed with almost everyone across the United States. They listened to her and agreed because she was more famous than any of the Mercury 13 women.

Website:

"Geraldyn 'Jerrie' M. Cobb Papers." Cobb, Jerrie. 1952-1998.
<https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/geraldyn-jerrie-m-cobb-papers-1952-1998> (Accessed March 4, 2020).

This website has Ms. Cobb's aviation and space careers, including magazines, manuals, handbooks, articles, photographs, and more. The papers focus on Aeronautics, Astronautics, Humanitarian Assistance, and the FLATS (First Lady Astronaut Trainees or the Mercury 13 women).

"Lovelace's Women in Space Program." Weitekamp, Margaret A.

<https://history.nasa.gov/flats.html> (Accessed March 27, 2020.)

Some of the women of the Mercury 13 are now deceased, and this website contains a list of the women that have either passed away or are still alive (which was very hard to find a full list). The website includes very detailed information, including facts and specific dates. Not only does it have just that list and specific dates, but the website talks about numerous x-rays involved, a four-hour eye test, and the women had to swallow a rubber tube because the scientists were testing their stomach acid. Jerri Cobb, Rhea Woltman, and Wally Funk all took extra tests in Oklahoma City. Those tests were an isolation tank and psychological

Evaluations. The rest of the women didn't take the tests because they couldn't due to other family and job commitments. This shows how those three were even more willing to be the first women in space (even though the others couldn't because of the issues, I just mean they spent all that extra time). Randy Lovelace's Program was kept secretive until 1963, the year the first female astronaut went into space. Her name is Valentina Tereshkova, and she is from Russia. That's when the media gave the program renewed attention. Then Life magazine wrote an article criticizing NASA for being sexist. And finally, Jerri Cobb and Jackie Cochran started their own separate women's astronaut testing program, but the United States didn't choose a women candidate until the class of 1978.

"May 25, 1961: JFK's Moon Shot Speech to Congress." Space.com.

<https://www.space.com/11772-president-kennedy-historic-speech-moon-space.html> (Accessed March 4, 2020).

This is a Secondary source. President John F Kennedy was a strong believer in space achievement. His speech was all about how someone will land on the moon, and how space exploration was a big thing for science.

Secondary:

Books:

Freni, Pamela. *Space for Women*. Seven Locks Press. 2002.

This is a Secondary Source. This book has very reliable information, including information on the hearings for female space exploration. It also has a whole spot in the back of the book that is full of good sources that I can find and use for my history day project.

Kevles, Bettyann Holtzmann. *Almost Heaven: The Story of Women in Space*. The MIT Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 2006.

This is a Secondary source. It talks about the amazing women who have come very close to breaking barriers. Not only is it about the Mercury 13, it also talks about many other women who have proved everyone that they are capable of what men can do.

Keil, Sally VanWagenen. *Those Wonderful Women in Their Flying Machines*. Four Direction Press. 1979.

This book is a story about the women pilots during World War II.

McGuire, Nina and Sandra Wallis Sammons. *Jacqueline Cochran America's Fearless Aviator*. Tailored Tours Publications. 1997.

This is a Secondary source. "Jacqueline Cochran America's Fearless Aviator" is a biography about her life growing up. It's not about her astronaut life, but about her life as an outstanding pilot.

Mendelsohn, Jane. *I Was Amelia Earhart*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1996.

A story about Amelia's story of what could've happened after her and her partner Fred Noonan disappeared. It is a fictional story but it does provide good facts about Amelia and her life in the world of women pilots.

Morgan, George D. *Rocket Girl*. Prometheus Books. 2013.

Mary Sherman Morgan was America's first female rocket scientist. This is a book about her story

Nolen, Stephanie. *Promised the Moon: The Untold Story of the First Women in the Space Race*. Publishers Group West. 2002.

This is a Secondary source. This book has information that we can use for research on the space race and how women were then. It is mainly on Jerri Cobb, a world-record-setting female pilot who took the astronaut tests in 1959

Smith, Sherri L. *Flygirl*. Penguin Group. 2008.

This was a story about a girl named Ida Mae Jones and her journey of being in the WASP program during World War II.

Stone, Tanya Lee. *Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream*. Candlewick Press. Somerville, Massachusetts. 2009.

This is a secondary source, because it is a history. This book is a timeline of the whole process that the women went through. Including the tests, and the results of what happened after they were done.

Weitekamp, Margaret A. *Right Stuff, Wrong Sex*. John Hopkins University Press. 2004.

This is a Secondary source. In "Right Stuff, Wrong Sex," it talks about Valentina Tereshkova and how she was the first woman put into orbit. Two years earlier, the Mercury 13 women took the astronaut tests, while under the private Woman in Space Program, which was created by William Lovelace and funded by Jacqueline Cochran.

Website:

Dunbar, Brian. "Women Who Reach for the Stars" NASA.

https://www.nasa.gov/missions/highlights/first_mercury13.html (Accessed March 2, 2020).

This website is about the Mercury 13 women, and how they were called "First Lady Astronaut Trainees" (FLAT). On the website, it talks about how the women took a test that pushed them to exhaustion. They had to ride a stationary bike, weighted, so that the scientists could see how good their respiratory systems were.

Dunbar, Brian. "The Mercury 13" NASA.

https://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/image_feature_691.html

(Accessed October 14, 2019).

The website has a very nice picture of some of the ladies, but at an older age. It has a little summary of what they did and why they were so important. Not a lot of information, but the picture was perfect as a prop we could use in our performance.

Gabbatt, Adam. "Mercury 13: The Untold Story of Women Testing for Spaceflight in the 1960s" The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/apr/18/mercury-13-space-women-nasa-1960s> (Accessed March 4, 2020).

This website article provides background information about each one of the Mercury 13 women. It gives a picture we used in our performance. It is a picture of some of the women when they were younger. It has a caption that was a quote from the Co-director Heather Walsh saying, "I think if that person was a woman it would have changed things. It would have seemed normal for women to do anything"

Gohd, Chelsea. "Who Will Be The First Woman on the Moon?" Space.

<https://www.space.com/who-will-be-first-woman-on-moon.html> (Accessed October 14, 2019).

This website didn't talk specifically about the Mercury 13 ladies, but about when women will finally step foot on the moon.

Klein, Christopher. "The Mercury 13: Meet the Woman Astronauts Grounded by NASA" History. <https://www.history.com/news/right-stuff-wrong-gender-the-woman-astronauts-grounded-by-nasa-2> (Accessed March 4, 2020).

History.com is always a good source to find good information on. This site is in depth on what happened, like the timeline of the women and their tests.

"Meet Mary 'Wally' Funk, 2019 Space Camp Hall of Fame Inductee" SpaceCamp.com.

https://www.spacecamp.com/social/2019-06-21/meet-mary-wally-funk-2019-space-camp-hall-fame-inductee?utm_source=all&utm_medium=all&utm_campaign=wally-funk

(Accessed March 4, 2020).

This is a Secondary source. This website is about how Wally got into the Space Camp hall of fame. It also talks about a gist of her getting into aviation.

Melanie. "The Twins of Mercury 13: Primary Source Search Leads to the Women of NASA" Wings Over the Bay.

<http://wingsoverthebay.blogspot.com/2011/12/twins-of-mercury-13-primary-source.html> (Accessed March 4, 2020).

This is a source. Mostly, it is a timeline on what happened in the space race, and barriers that were broken in the 60's.

Oberg, James. "The Mercury 13: Setting things Right" The Space Review.

<https://www.thespacereview.com/article/869/1> (Accessed March 4, 2020).

This is a secondary force. It's almost like a reality check on what the Mercury 13 was. The website is very useful because it has truths about what happened.

Potenza, Alessandra. "We Fact Checked Mercury 13, Netflix's doc about NASA's First Woman Astronaut Trainees" The Verge.

<https://www.theverge.com/2018/5/29/17393698/netflix-documentary-mercury-13-women-space-astronauts-margaret-weitekamp-interview> (Accessed January 7, 2020).

The website states why the women should be called something other than the Mercury 13, why there were no women astronauts at the time, the Lovelace Program, if what the Netflix documentary was all true or not, why the Lovelace Program was cancelled, and more.

"Rhea Woltman" Colorado Women's Hall of Fame. 2019.

<https://www.cogreatwomen.org/project/rhea-woltman/> (Accessed March 27, 2020)

This was a good website that gave a short summary of Rhea and all of her achievements throughout her life. After she left the training she became a registered parliamentarian.

Weitekamp, Margaret, A. "Lovelace's Woman in Space Program" NASA.

<https://history.nasa.gov/flats.html> (Accessed October 14, 2019).

This website talks in depth about what the Lovelace's Woman in Space Program was and who the thirteen women who passed the physical examinations that the Foundation had made for NASA's decision on who would become an astronaut.

Wilde, George. "The Woman Cheated out of Space by Gender Politics" Huck.

<https://www.huckmag.com/perspectives/activism-2/wally-funk-the-woman-cheated-out-of-space-by-gender-politics/> (Accessed March 4, 2020).

This website is a good site to be used because it talks mostly all about Wally Funk. It states everything that happened with Wally, like how she got into wanting to become an astronaut, Jerri Cobb.

Wray, Dianna. "The Mercury 13 Women Were Ready for Space, But NASA Never Gave Them a Chance" Houston Press.

<https://www.houstonpress.com/news/nasa-never-gave-mercury-13-women-the-chance-to-fly-9792355> (Accessed March 4, 2020).

This is a Secondary source. This website is all about when every girl in the Mercury 13 group started being a pilot at a very young age.