

Mathematician Biography

MATH



Overview

Students research and present the life of a famous mathematician, learning how mathematical discoveries were made and why they matter.

Steps for Teachers

1. Provide a list of mathematicians or let students research options
2. Students select a mathematician and research their life and work
3. Students identify the mathematician's key discovery or contribution
4. Students write a script explaining both their life and their math
5. Students create a character to represent the mathematician
6. Students record the biography with visual examples of the math
7. Discuss how each mathematician's work affects our lives today

Example

A student presents Katherine Johnson. Character: 'I'm Katherine Johnson, and I helped send astronauts to the moon! I loved counting from the time I was little. People didn't think girls—especially Black girls—could be mathematicians, but I proved them wrong. I calculated the flight paths for NASA's first space missions. The astronauts trusted my math with their lives. John Glenn wouldn't fly until I personally checked the computer's calculations!'

Grading Rubric

Criteria	Excellent	Proficient	Developing
Biographical Accuracy	Life events are accurate and well-researched	Most biographical information is correct	Contains biographical errors
Mathematical Contribution	Clearly explains the mathematician's discovery and why it matters	Mentions the mathematical contribution	Fails to explain the mathematical work
Engaging Narrative	Brings the mathematician to life; makes viewers care	Reasonably engaging presentation	Dry recitation of facts
Historical Context	Shows challenges faced and how they were overcome	Mentions some historical context	No context about the time period