

Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space

Parliament Hill School, Hampstead Heath, will be working with Scarabeus Theatre, Kingston University, the Women's Library and the Science Museum in a project called The Dark Side of the Moon, thanks to a grant of almost £48,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The first woman in space was Russian Valentina Tereshkova in 1963. It was 20 years later that Sally Ride became the first American space woman and Helen Sharman in 1991 became the first British astronaut when she visited MIR, the Russian space station. Since then, female space farers have commanded the Shuttle and the International Space Station, and China has launched two women into space. The young researchers from Parliament Hill School will interview a number of women working in the space programme and space science today.

They will visit the Science Museum's Space Collection, including the forthcoming Cosmonauts Exhibition and research the Women's Library archive to uncover the changing role of women in 20th-century society and how early discrimination against women in the American space programme was eventually overcome. Their studies will include advances in science and technology linked to the exploration of space and the geopolitical rivalries that underpinned the 'Space Race' in the Cold War era of the 1950s and 1960s.

The project culminates in three multi-media theatrical performances assisted by Scarabeus Theatre, an Archway-based performing arts company which specialises in aerial and abseiling performances. The project will be documented on a dedicated website that will include publically accessible teaching resources.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: “The story of these women is one of overcoming physical and technological challenges in space and, in some cases, prejudice here on Earth. Their achievements merit greater recognition and we are delighted that those involved in this project, assisted by our Young Roots programme, are determined to give these high flying women the credit they deserve.”

Daniela Essart, Artistic Director of Scarabeus Theatre, said: “This project will allow the students to explore a side of history which is relatively unknown - the achievements of women who became part of the space exploration programme and furthered human knowledge. I am delighted to be delving into this hidden history with the students at Parliament Hill School, and look forward to taking them on a journey of discovery and giving them the opportunity to fly to the moon!”

Sarah Creasey, Associate Headteacher of Parliament Hill School, said: “We are delighted to be hosting this exciting project looking at the history of women astronauts, and to welcoming project partners from the Science Museum, Kingston University and The Women's Library to work with the girls alongside Scarabeus Aerial Theatre. We are sure this will be a unique and enriching project for our students and we very much look forward to seeing the results of their work this summer.”

Tim Dhir, Education Liaison Officer, Kingston University: “Kingston University is excited to be helping the young women of Parliament Hill School explore the history of women in space as part of our commitment to raising the aspirations and attainment of students from backgrounds that are under-represented in higher education.”

Notes to editors

To date 60 women have taken part in space missions and female astronauts are now commonplace. Among their number have been: Valentina Tereshkova (first woman in space – Russian, 1963); Svetlana Savitskaya (second woman in space – Russian, 1982); Sally Ride (first American woman in space, 1983); Helen Sharman (first Briton in space, 1991); Mae Jemison (first African-American woman in space, 1992). Eileen Collins (first woman Shuttle pilot, 1999 and first woman to command a US spacecraft); Peggy Whitson (first woman to command the International Space Station, 2007 American); Liu Yang (first Chinese woman in space, 2012) and Samantha Cristoforetti, first Italian woman in space (currently serving on the International Space Station).

Further information

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