Discussion Questions
“When Computers Wore Skirts:” Katherine Johnson, Christine Darden, and the “West Computers”

1. Compare Katherine Johnson’s and Christine Darden’s life and experience at NASA. How were their experiences similar? How were they different?

2. When did electronic computers start being introduced into NASA? What were they like (appearance, size, etc.) and how did people use them?

3. How were Katherine Johnson and Christine Darden recruited to work at NASA? How did they end up leaving the “computer pool”?

4. How was the computer pool organized? How did the computers receive assignments? How did this change over time?

5. What major historical events led to the first African American women being able to work at NASA?

6. What are some of the larger changes that were happening in African American history between when Katherine Johnson started as a computer at NASA in the 1940s and when Christine Darden started in the late-1960s? How would these changes have affected their experiences at NASA?

7. What do you think it would have been like for Johnson and Darden as African American women to work in a predominantly white and male environment as engineers?