

Valentina Tereshkova

Valentina Tereshkova is a retired Russian **cosmonaut** who was the first woman to fly in space. On 16th June 1963, she flew the spacecraft Vostok 6 around Earth. In total, she orbited the planet 48 times, which took her almost three days.

Valentina was selected from more than 400 others and her mission was to find out how the female body reacted to spaceflight. She controlled the spacecraft, kept a flight log and took some incredible photograph of Earth from space. Some of the pictures showed how the world was suffering from the effects of global warming and have been used by scientists to improve their understanding of it.



Early Life

Although her parents came from **Belarus**, Valentina was born in central Russia and grew up in a village called Maslennikovo. Her father was a tractor driver and an army tank leader who fought in the Second World War, while her mother worked in a **textile plant**. Valentina left school at just 16 when she discovered her passion for skydiving.

In 1959, when she was 22, Valentina made her first jump and it was her skill as a skydiver that eventually led to her being picked as a cosmonaut.

Space Training

Valentina was interested in politics and the communist idea that everyone in society should be treated equally. This brought her to the attention of the **Soviet Space Programme**. Being such a skilful skydiver and having joined the **Young Communist League** when she was younger – as well as having a war hero as a father – Valentina was seen as the ideal candidate to join the cosmonaut corps.

Five women were picked in total but only one of them was needed for the spaceflight. It was up to Valentina to prove that she was the one they wanted.

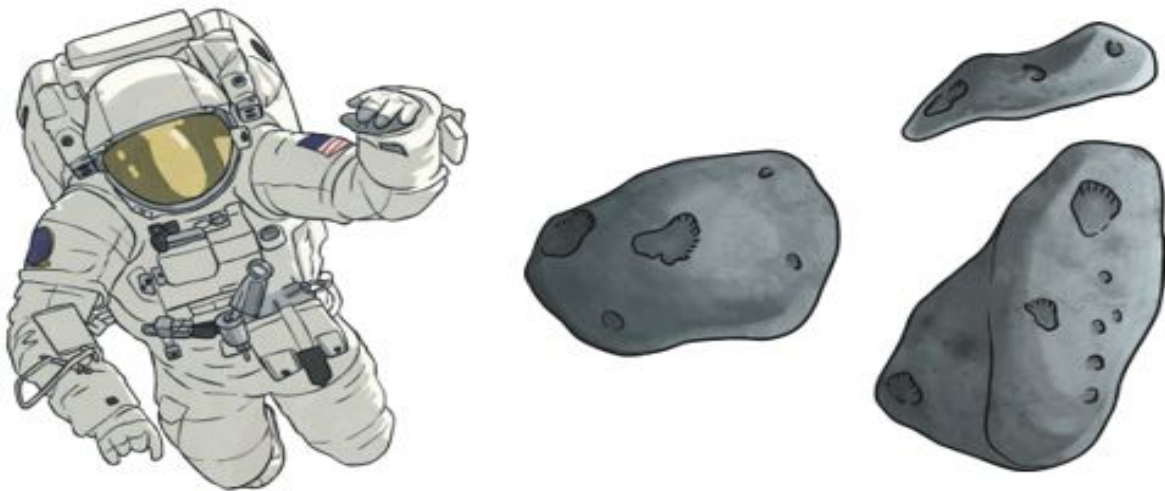


The training was intense and the candidates had to take many physical and mental tests. This included months of weightless flights, long periods on their own and lessons in rocket theory and spacecraft engineering. They also undertook 120 parachute jumps and trained in jet fighter planes. Training concluded with exams and, in 1962, Valentina passed with two of the other candidates.

The State Space Commission chose Valentina as the Vostok 6 pilot a month before the flight and, on 16th June 1963, Vostok 6 was ready for launch. After a two-hour countdown, the spacecraft launched into the atmosphere. The mission was a success and, within minutes, Valentina had become the first woman in space.

The Flight

Being confined to such a small area, Valentina felt cramped and sick for most of the flight but managed three days in space before returning to Earth.



Quick Facts



Known for: First woman in space

Nationality: Russian

Date of birth: 6th March 1937

Place of birth: Bolshoye Maslennikovo, Central Russia

Occupation: Cosmonaut, politician, engineer

Spacecraft: Vostok 6

Space time: 2 days, 22 hrs and 50 mins

Legacy

Out of the five female candidates that trained to become a cosmonaut, only Valentina made it into space. 19 years later, in 1982, Svetlana Savitskaya joined Valentina in the record books when she became the second woman in space aboard Soyuz T-7.

During her life, Valentina married twice. Her first husband was also a cosmonaut and, in 1964, they had a daughter, Elena. Elena was the first person in the world whose parents had both been to space!

As well as being a cosmonaut, Valentina was an engineer and politician during her working life. Now retired, she remains an inspiration to men and women throughout the world.



Awards

- Hero of the Soviet Union
- Order 'For Merit to the Fatherland'
- Order of Lenin
- Order of the October Revolution
- Order of Alexander Nevsky
- Order of Honour
- Order of Friendship



Glossary

Belarus: An eastern European country.

cosmonaut: A Russian astronaut

Soviet: From a group of countries which used to be called the Soviet Union.

textile plant: A factory that produces cloth or fabric.

Young Communist League: A group of young people that believe in communist ideas.

Questions

1. Who was Valentina Tereshkova and what was she the first to do?

2. Valentina took some incredible photographs of Earth from space. What do you think made them so incredible?

3. What was the only award Valentina received that wasn't an Order?

4. What did Valentina do in 1959?

5. What do you think the **Soviet Space Programme** was?

6. From what you have read in the text, which **two** words best describe Valentina Tereshkova?

- organised
- determined
- skilful
- happy
- shrewd

7. Number these events 1 – 5 to show the order that they are first mentioned in the text. The first one has been done for you.

- Soyuz T-7 was launched.
- 1 She filled in a log.
- Her father drove a tractor and a tank.
- She joined the Cosmonaut Corps.
- The State Space Commission chose her as the Vostok 6 pilot.

8. **Now retired, she remains an inspiration to men and women throughout the world.**

Why is Valentina an inspiration?

9. If Valentina had any regrets about the space flight what do you think they may have been? Explain why you think this.
