

Teacher in Space Answers Questions From Students

This is the VOA Special English EDUCATION REPORT.

SOUND: "Good morning, Discovery Center -- good afternoon. We're happy to be here with you.

This is Al Drew, Clay Anderson, Dave Williams and I'm Barb Morgan. And we are ready for your first question. Welcome aboard the International Space Station."

That was teacher-turned-astronaut Barbara Morgan, speaking from more than three hundred twenty kilometers above the Earth.

CHILDREN: "Hello from Idaho!"

And those were the students she was greeting in the northwestern state of Idaho. They gathered at the Discovery Center in Boise on Tuesday to ask the astronauts questions by video link.

The astronauts already knew what the questions would be. One student asked what stars look like from space.

Basically, the answer was that the space shuttle and the space station are kept brightly lit, so it is difficult to see a lot of stars.

BARBARA MORGAN: "In fact, one way to think about that when we're on the International Space Station and all the lights are on when we look outside, it's very much like trying to look at the stars when you're in Boise. You can see some, but then if you go up high in the mountains, up to McCall, and you have all the lights out, that's what it will be like once we undock from

[the] station and we can turn all our shuttle lights out, and also for the station folks they can turn all their lights out."

Barbara Morgan taught elementary school in McCall, Idaho, before she trained for space. She and six other astronauts arrived Friday on the shuttle Endeavour to bring supplies and new equipment to the international station.

Barbara Morgan is fifty-five years old. She taught for many years before she became an astronaut.

QUESTION: "Hi, I'm Sarah Blum. How does being a teacher relate with being an astronaut on this mission?"

BARBARA MORGAN: "Well, astronauts and teachers actually do the same things. We explore, we discover and we share. And the great thing about being a teacher is you get to do that with students. And the great thing about being an astronaut is you get to do it in space. And those are absolutely wonderful jobs."

Barbara Morgan first prepared for a shuttle flight more than twenty years ago. She trained in case NASA needed a substitute for Christa McAuliffe, its choice to become the first teacher in space.

Then, in nineteen eighty-six, Christa McAuliffe died with the Challenger crew when the shuttle exploded shortly after launch.

After the disaster, NASA officials barred other civilians from shuttle flights. But in nineteen ninety-eight, they created a new position for teachers to become fully trained astronauts. Barbara Morgan is NASA's first "educator astronaut" launched into orbit.

One of her first tasks was to operate Endeavour's robotic arm to inspect the shuttle for any launch-related damage. Cameras showed a small area hit by a piece of protective foam that fell off the fuel tank. NASA officials say the damage is not a safety threat but they are deciding what to do about it.

And that's the VOA Special English EDUCATION REPORT, written by Nancy Steinbach. For a link to NASA educational resources, go to voaspecialenglish.com. I'm Mario Ritter.

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