

EDUCATION

# From making spacesuits to landing 'spacecraft,' Houston County camp exposes girls to STEM

BY AVA CHATLOSH  
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Elevent instructors circulate the classroom as students prepare their Galaxy jars.  
AVA CHATLOSH/THE TELEGRAPH

Twenty-two girls sat at their desks in the upstairs classrooms of the Century of Flight Hangar in Houston County. The classroom's purple walls were decorated with STEM

and science-themed posters. Pencils, markers, and scissors filled the green organizers in the center of each desk.

“Star,” the instructor called.

“Base,” the girls responded.

It was the first day at [Starbase Robins'](#) eighth annual all-girls summer stem camp: STEmpower Girls.

This year's theme encompasses [NASA's new graphic novel](#) “First Woman, Expanding our Universe,” partially [inspired by](#) NASA astronaut Jasmin Moghbeli, [commander of SpaceX Crew-7](#). Throughout the week, middle school girls learn about space exploration in classes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

STEM project manager Trelaine Jackson said having an all-female STEM camp is important for increasing the percentage of women in STEM.

In 2020, women made up only [34% of the STEM workforce](#), according to the National Girls Collaborative Project. This discrepancy is what the American Association of University Women calls the “[STEM gap](#).” The American Association of University Women lists gender stereotypes, a male-dominated culture, a lack of role models and [a confidence gap](#) between [boys](#) and girls doing math as reasons for a gender gap in STEM.

“Having these all-female camps gives them a chance to say ‘I can do that. Why can't I do that? Who is stopping me?’” said Starbase Robins' Lead Instructor Kylie Youmans.

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Yolanda Bivens, program manager at Robins Air Force Base, said she was super excited when her daughter was accepted into two of Starbase Robins' summer camps, and she definitely wanted her to do the all-girls camp.

"I wanted her to see how other girls can be innovative as well, and how being smart is actually cool and appreciated," said Bivens.

To finish up their Monday, instructors had the girls rotate classrooms from where they were learning to **land small model "spacecrafts"** they built using materials like paper, glue and string to making galaxy jars. While they stuffed their mason jars with cotton balls and glitter, instructors explained the differences between a nebula and a galaxy.



Galaxy jars were one of many activities that middle school-age girls get to participate in for Starbase Robins' STEM camp. Ava Chatlosh/The Telegraph

Throughout the rest of the week, girls have the chance to design crew modules, learn about constellations, design space suits, build rockets, do Venus cloud experiments, and conduct space travel research.

To join the camp, students had to submit letters of recommendation, have a good GPA, and have good standing at their school. Youmans said they're all happy to be there.

"Parents will tell us sometimes, 'man so and so just could not stop talking about everything that you guys did yesterday,'" said Youmans. "You can sense the excitement."

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