

Astronaut talks with kids in Puerto Rico — from space!

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.18.18

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Image 1. Astronaut Joseph Acaba (lower right), aboard the International Space Station, takes questions from students (upper left) at the Puerto Rico Institute of Robotics on January 12, 2018. One student asked how Puerto Rico looked from space after Hurricane Maria struck in September 2017. Acaba said the first thing he noticed was the lack of electricity. It made the island almost impossible to see at night. Photos from NASA via AP

Joe Acaba is a NASA astronaut. NASA is the U.S. space group. **Mr. Acaba is up on the International Space Station.** The space station is like a science lab. But it is a science lab up in space. It circles the planet.

Acaba's family comes from Puerto Rico. Last week, he talked to a group of students. They live in Puerto Rico. **He answered their questions — from space!**

Puerto Rico is an island. It sits in the Caribbean Sea. It is not a state, but it is part of the United States. The island is run by the U.S. government. People who are born there are Americans.

In September, a big storm hit the island. It was Hurricane Maria. The storm knocked down houses. It knocked out power, too. Parts of the island still do not have power. There is a lot of damage to fix.

Puerto Rico After Hurricane

Mr. Acaba flew to the space station in September. He went one week before Maria hit. One student asked how Puerto Rico looked from space after Maria. Mr. Acaba said it looked very dark. There were no lights. He almost could not see the island at all.



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After the storm, there were food shortages in Puerto Rico. There was not much food to eat.

There is plenty of food on the space station. But there are not many different kinds of food. Astronauts eat the same foods over and over. One boy asked Mr. Acaba if this is hard.

Food In Space Gets Boring

Mr. Acaba said he liked the food in space. It gets boring, though, he said. Puerto Rican dishes are much better, Mr. Acaba said. He cannot get pasteles up there. Pasteles are stuffed meat pastries. They are wrapped in banana leaves. Pasteles are popular around Christmas.

Mr. Acaba said he was ready to go home. He plans to eat a great meal when he arrives. Mr. Acaba will return to Earth in February.

The astronaut's parents were from Puerto Rico. They later moved to the United States. Mr. Acaba was born in California. He grew up there. Many of his family members still live in Puerto Rico, though.

Students were curious about all kinds of things. Mr. Acaba used to be a teacher. They asked about that. They also wanted to know about life on the space station. What is it like? Sometimes Mr. Acaba answered in English. Sometimes he spoke Spanish. In Puerto Rico most people speak Spanish.

Sounds Gross But Tastes Great

Some students were interested in the drinking water on the space station. It is recycled from the crew's pee. The students thought this sounded gross. But Mr. Acaba said the water tastes great. It is natural, he said.

Mr. Acaba joined NASA in 2004. That was 13 years ago. He is the first NASA astronaut whose family comes from Puerto Rico. He is also the only one.

Quiz

- 1 Where did Joe Acaba answer the questions?
- (A) the International Space Station
 - (B) Puerto Rico
 - (C) the Caribbean Sea
 - (D) California
- 2 What is a reason WHY Puerto Rico looked dark from space?
- (A) It was time for people to sleep.
 - (B) They lost power after the storm.
 - (C) A cloud was covering the island.
 - (D) The sun was not shining there.
- 3 What is the article MAINLY about?
- (A) a science class in Puerto Rico
 - (B) the hurricane in Puerto Rico
 - (C) a Puerto Rican astronaut
 - (D) the types of food in space
- 4 Read the following paragraph from the section "Sounds Gross But Tastes Great."

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What is the focus of this paragraph?

- (A) what Mr. Acaba's favorite food is
- (B) how eating space food is really gross
- (C) what people in Puerto Rico like to eat
- (D) how astronauts drink water in space

Answer Key

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