



## Debating the Apollo 11 Moon Landing

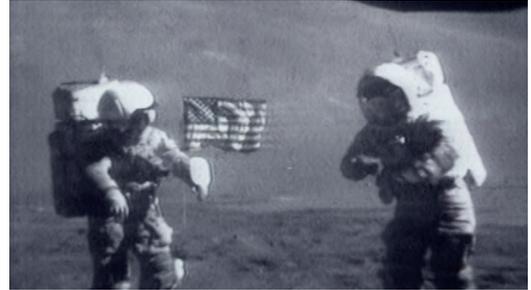
### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was NASA's Apollo program and why was it controversial?

#### OVERVIEW

**“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”**



As NASA astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first human to step onto the surface of the Moon in July 1969, his words sought to include all of humanity in the historic event. Indeed, people all around the world expressed pride in the success of NASA's Apollo 11 mission, which was all the more impressive considering how quickly it had been achieved.

In May 1961, President John F. Kennedy addressed Congress in a speech titled, “Special Message to Congress on Urgent National Needs.” In that speech, he proclaimed, “I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.” Less than a decade later, the United States had achieved mission success.

In reality, the Apollo Program's accelerated pace was due less to the passion for discovery and more due to the “Space Race” between the United States and its superpower adversary at that time, the communist Soviet Union. Since the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik 1 in 1957, the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth, the U.S. had lagged behind its Soviet competitors in exploratory achievements in space. There was concern among national leaders and the American public that continued Soviet success would diminish American prestige internationally, and potentially give the Soviets an advantage in possible future military maneuvers in space.

On the geopolitical stage, mission success was a triumph for the United States government against the Soviet Union. The U.S. had achieved a powerfully symbolic and strategic victory. But that triumph had come with a huge price tag, and many Americans felt the “Space Race” had diverted precious financial resources away from serious domestic needs in the United States.

## “A rat done bit my sister Nell, with whitey on the moon.”

The cost of the Apollo program was enormous, totaling over \$25 billion (over \$150 billion in 2019 dollars) when the last mission took place in 1972, and public support for the program had never been robust. In fact, apart from the Apollo 11 mission in the last days of July 1969, the Apollo program had not garnered wide support in numerous polls conducted between 1965 and 1975. Specifically, a substantial number of Americans, including a majority of minority groups and communities of color, expressed that the nation had more important priorities than space exploration throughout the program’s entire history.

Poet and musician Gil Scott-Heron’s recording “Whitey on the Moon” channeled the resentment and disillusionment of many Americans towards the Apollo program. The song’s refrain, “A rat done bit my sister Nell, with whitey on the moon,” referenced the rejected 1967 congressional legislation that would have addressed lingering quality of life issues for residents in public housing who were experiencing chronic rodent problems. Furthermore, the refrain succinctly supplied a contrasting narrative to the celebrations surrounding the Apollo 11 moon landing mission.

In this lesson, students will watch clips from CNN’s Soundtracks to identify historic details of NASA’s Apollo program. Students will then identify poet and musician Gil Scott-Heron’s critical view of the Apollo program through his song, “Whitey On The Moon” and participate in a structured academic controversy activity to debate the controversy of the program.

### OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

#### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- About the historic details of NASA’s Apollo program throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and the specific Apollo 11 mission to the moon in July 1969
- Arguments in favor of and critical of the Apollo 11 mission
- Important figures and groups that celebrated and criticized the Apollo 11 mission
- Poet and musician Gil Scott-Heron’s critical view of the Apollo program through his song, “Whitey On The Moon”

#### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to identify reasons for celebration and criticism of NASA’s Apollo program and the Apollo 11 moon landing mission by researching and debating both sides.

## ACTIVITIES

## MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Play **Clip 1, “One Small Step”**. Ask students:

- What is happening in this clip? Why was it historic?
- What might have Neil Armstrong meant when he said, “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”? What might “one small step for man” mean? What might “one giant leap for mankind” mean?
- Who might be included in the term “mankind” from the quote? Who might be excluded? Are there other instances of broad terms such as “mankind” being used to represent only some citizens in U.S. history?”
- Were all people represented by the success of the Apollo 11 mission? Why or why not?

## PROCEDURE:

1. Play **Clip 2, The Moon Landing**. Ask students:

- Why was the Apollo 11 mission celebrated?
- Was the Apollo 11 mission celebrated internationally? Why?
- What were some of the reasons the moon landing was a remarkable achievement?
- What challenges needed to be overcome to make the mission successful?
- What may have been the reason for the United States starting the Apollo program?

2. Play **Clip 3, The Space Race**. Ask students:

- Why might there have been concern when the Soviet Union launched the first satellite into space?
- Why might the launch be perceived as a threat to the United States and other countries?

- What was the United States’ response to the Soviet launch?

- What might NASA Flight Director Gene Kranz mean with his statement that the Apollo program drew out “the best that America had to offer?”

- Given the political motivations of the moon landing, do you think there are groups of people who did not celebrate the mission? If so, who might they be and why might they have not celebrated?

3. Play **Clip 4, “Whitey on the Moon.”** Ask students:

- Who might Scott-Heron be referring to when he says “whitey”?

- Why might he be continually referring to his sister being bit by a rat? (As an option, teachers can pass out and have students read **Handout 3 - Rat Control Bill Rejected**. Otherwise, teachers can explain to students that Congress failed to pass legislation in 1967 that would’ve created

a “federal grant program to aid localities in controlling and exterminating rats.”)

- When Meshell Ndegeocello states, “You could never understand why there was such great poverty, yet you could send a man to the moon,” how is she critiquing the Apollo program?
- What might space historian Asif Siddiqi be suggesting when discussing the locations of 125th and Lenox Avenue in New York City in comparison to NASA locations (Kennedy Space Center in Florida and NASA mission control center in Houston) in the video clip?
- According to Siddiqi, Scott-Heron’s message in the song might be considered “abrasive” to many people but it, “had to be said.” Who might consider the song’s message abrasive? Why? Why did the message in the song “have to be said”?

4. Organize students into small groups of 5-8 students for a Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) activity. Give out **Handout 1 - Arguments for the Apollo Mission**, and **Handout 2 - Arguments against the Apollo Mission** to each group.
5. Display **Image 1, Structured Academic Controversy Instructions**, and have student groups follow the instructions presented on the image.
6. Ask the groups to share their discussions with the rest of the class. Then, allow students to choose the positions in the controversy they most strongly about, and carry out a free debate as an entire class.

## SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students, and debate as a class:

- Do you feel the Apollo program qualified as an “urgent national need” or should other national issues have taken priority?
- If you feel the Apollo program was an urgent national need, why do you feel that way?
- If you feel the Apollo program was not an urgent national need, why do you feel that way and what were the urgent national needs that instead could have taken priority?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

### Design Your Own Distortion Pedal!

1. Writing Prompt: What is an issue that you consider an “urgent national need,” like President Kennedy declared of space exploration in 1961? Research your choice and write a short essay explaining why it should be considered an urgent need.



## 2. Research Essay: The Apollo Program After Apollo 11

- When was the Apollo program closed? Why? When was the last mission? What was its mission designation number?
- Research and summarize the timeline of the Apollo program, including when it closed and the last Apollo mission. Additionally, describe some of the important historic events and scientific discoveries that happened on the missions after Apollo 11. If you feel the Apollo program was not an urgent national need, why do you feel that way and what were the urgent national needs that instead could have taken priority?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)*

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)*

Text Types and Purposes 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Text Types and Purposes 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)*

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Language 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)*

Comprehension & Collaboration 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Comprehension & Collaboration 3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

## **NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)**

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)**

### *Core Music Standard: Responding*

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

### *Core Music Standard: Connecting*

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.

## **THE COLLABORATIVE FOR ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES**

### *Social Awareness*

- Perspective-Taking
- Empathy
- Respect for Others

### *Self-Management*

- Impulse Control

### *Relationship Skills*

- Communication
- Teamwork

## RESOURCES

### VIDEO RESOURCES

- “One Small Step”
- *CNN Soundtracks* - The Moon Landing
- *CNN Soundtracks* - The Space Race
- *CNN Soundtracks* - “Whitey on the Moon”
- *CNN Soundtracks* - Arguments for the Apollo Program
- *CNN Soundtracks* - Arguments against the Apollo Program

### HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - Arguments for the Apollo Mission
- Handout 2 - Arguments for the Apollo Mission
- Handout 3 - “Rat Control Rejected”