

8F: The Space Race Collection

From the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a tense race against time where only one question mattered: Who would be the first to dominate space exploration? This competition would become known as the “Space Race,” and its effects can still be felt today in events such as the current global rush to explore the planet Mars. In this Collection, students explore primary documents and conduct independent research to better understand this space race between two of the world’s superpowers. The dramatic story of the space race offers students a rich research topic to explore as they build information literacy skills and learn how to construct their own research questions and explore the Internet for answers. Students also participate in a Socratic seminar in which they rely on their research to examine the complicated issues inherent in the history of the space race.

Throughout these activities, students conduct research to develop a deep understanding of this unique international competition. Each student is assigned a cosmonaut or astronaut from the space race era. They research their cosmonaut or astronaut and write entries into their space blog from their person’s point of view. As students reach the end of the unit, they synthesize all of the skills they’ve developed to tackle a culminating research assignment—part essay, part multimedia project.

Core texts your student will read:

- The Space Race: An Introduction by *Lapham’s Quarterly* editors
- Excerpt: “Sputnik” from *Rocket Boys* by Homer Hickam
- Excerpt: “And a Dog Shall Lead Them” from *A Ball, a Dog, and a Monkey* by Michael D’Antonio
- Memorandum for the Vice President by John F. Kennedy
- Excerpt: President Kennedy’s Address at Rice University, September 12, 1962
- Excerpt: “A Seagull in Flight” from *Into That Silent Sea* by Francis French and Colin Burgess
- Excerpt: “First to Fly” from *Into That Silent Sea* by Francis French and Colin Burgess
- “In Event of Moon Disaster” by William Safire
- Excerpt: “Dreaming of a Moonage” from *Moondust* by Andrew Smith
- “Buzz Aldrin on His Lunar Home, the Eagle” from *The Wall Street Journal* by Marc Myers
- Excerpt: “Smooth as a Peeled Egg” from *Two Sides of the Moon: Our Story of the Cold War Space Race* by David Scott and Alexei Leonov with Christine Toomey
- Excerpt: Preface from *Flight: My Life in Mission Control* by Christopher C. Kraft, Jr. and James L. Scheffer
- “What the Moon Rocks Tell Us” from *National Geographic* by Kenneth F. Weaver
- Excerpt: “You Are Here” from *Pale Blue Dot* by Carl Sagan
- Katherine Johnson: Trailblazer and Brilliant Mathematician
- Excerpt: “Life on Mars to Become a Reality in 2023, Dutch Firm Claims” from *The Guardian* by Karen McVeigh

What my student will do/learn:

- Students conduct fun and “low-stakes” scavenger hunts to become familiar with the range of texts and images included in this unit.
- Students learn how to construct research questions and identify appropriate and relevant websites and Internet sources for answers.

- Students assume the identity of an astronaut or cosmonaut during the space race, then research their experience and write blog entries from their point of view.
- Students establish expectations, prepare questions for, and engage in a Socratic seminar, discussing the circumstances and consequences of the space race.
- Students continue to write in response to prompts 2–3 times weekly, and practice analytic writing in response to text by developing a controlling idea or claim and providing support with details or evidence.
- Students write an end-of-unit essay responding to one of the following prompts:
 - a. Research Option 1: Argumentative Essay: Research and discover what the Soviets and the Americans were trying to understand when they sent animals into space. Was animal testing necessary? Was it fair or moral to send animals into space for research purposes? Could the scientists have found the answers they were looking for without sacrificing animals? If so, how? Research sources in the Collection and on the Internet as you collect evidence and prove your case. Write an argumentative essay persuading your reader of your way of thinking. Be sure to include a list of the resources you used in your research.
 - b. Research Option 2: Informative Essay: How did Katherine Johnson and the other women who worked with her at NASA impact the Space Race? Write an informative essay about Katherine Johnson and the other key women who worked at NASA during the Space Race era. Who were the other key women who worked with Katherine Johnson and what roles did they play? What barriers did they face? How was the Space Race impacted by their work?
- Students also create an interactive timeline to share their essay research with the class.

Here are some conversation starters that you can use during this unit to promote discussion and encourage continued learning with your student:

1. As you worked to evaluate sources, what did you notice about the credible websites? What advice might you give a friend looking for information on the Internet?
2. What was the most surprising thing you learned when you wrote blog entries by someone from the space race? How did putting yourself in their shoes affect the way you understood different events and experiences?
3. What are some facts you learned about the circumstances, consequences, and/or participants of the space race?
4. What is one way our approach to space exploration has changed since the space race? What is one way it remains the same?
5. Can you share one of your blog entries that you wrote as a cosmonaut or astronaut involved in the space race? (Provide feedback to your student by finding something in their writing that you can respond to as a reader. For example, “I like how you describe the overwhelming awe you felt when you stepped out on the moon with Neil Armstrong. Adding those specific details really show me how you were feeling.”)