

THE WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Classroom: Grades 9-12

President as Visionary: "Others Ask Why Not?"

Activity - The Cosmonaut and the Astronaut: Two Space Missions Compared

Using the Guide to Periodical Literature, and biographical sources, find out all you can about the preparation, implementation, and follow-up of the first flight of either Yuri Gagarin, who orbited the earth in the Vostok I on April 12, 1961, or Alan Shepard who flew in the Freedom 7 on May 5, 1961. Since both the Soviet Union and the United States wanted to capitalize on their achievements in space, the cosmonaut and the astronaut were questioned endlessly about the details of their respective experiences, so you should be able to gather plenty of information. Make a set of detailed notes, keeping in mind these questions:



Alan Shepard and his Mercury capsule are picked up

1. What specifically was your mission, and did you accomplish it? Had anyone done this before? What was different about this mission from others?
2. How were you chosen for the first mission? Did you receive any special pay? Were others as well trained and qualified as you? How did you find out you were the "chosen one"?
3. How long was the flight? Did you leave the earth's atmosphere? Did you orbit the earth, or simply "slingshot" into space? During the time you were in space, what work did you do?
4. What concerns did you have about the ability of your body to physically adapt to the conditions of this flight?
5. Did you feel fear, exhilaration, or both? Did anything happen that was not covered in your training?
6. Were you able to communicate with ground control during your flight? What did you say? What video or audio record was made of your trip?
7. How did your family feel about your participation in these flights?
8. How were you treated before and after you made your historic flight? Were you given a hero's welcome? What officials representing the government greeted you? Did your photograph appear on magazine covers? Did you make appearances on talk shows?

Activity:

Imagine that you are either Gagarin or Shepard. You understand that this is a historic moment and that your memory of it will be important to posterity. Using the methods of Lewis and Clark, write a series of journal entries covering any four days of your experience. Work into your entries as many details relating to the above questions as you can. Try to adopt a journal "voice" that seems authentic.

As a follow-up, research the U.S.-Soviet rendezvous-docking mission of July 15, 1975. Gather information in similar ways, and write another series of four journal entries from either the Soviet or the U.S. perspective.

Using the entries from both journals, think of a creative way to show changes that have occurred in the following aspects of the space program: national mission, comfort level, practicality, safety, and design.

An alternative

After completing the questions for either the first flight of Gagarin or Shepard, draw a detailed diagram of that spacecraft and the one used in the U.S.-Soviet space rendezvous-docking mission. (Check the resources page [*see appendix*] for books that might be helpful in finding this information.) Putting the diagrams side by side, explain at least ten important differences in terms of mission, comfort, practicality, safety, and design.

A partnership alternative

Complete the diagram assignment above. Ask a partner to complete the two sets of journal entries described in the first part of the activity. Plan a presentation in which your partner describes changes between the first and second missions, using journal entries as a source. You, in turn, support his or her explanations, using the information in the diagrams. After the presentation, display the journals and diagrams together so students can see them up close.

A follow-up

After you have completed any version of this activity, describe in writing how it helped you better understand changing relationships between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Resources to Support Student Activities: Lesson 2

Many activities associated with this lesson invite further research. There are dozens of rich resources about the journey of the Corps of Discovery and the missions of the space program. Here are a few that you may find helpful in support of these activities:

Ambrose, Stephen E., *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*. New York. Simon and Schuster, 1996.

Ambrose, Stephen E. *Lewis & Clark: Voyage of Discovery*, Washington, DC. The National Geographic Society, 1998.

Duncan, Dayton and Ken Burns. *Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery, An Illustrated History*. New York. Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

Lee, Wayne. *To Rise From Earth: An Easy to Understand Guide to Spaceflight*. New York. Facts on File, Inc.

Murray, Charles and Catherine Bly Cox. *Apollo: The Race to the Moon*. New York. Simon and Schuster, 1989.

Schmidt, Thomas and Jeremy Schmidt. *The Saga of Lewis & Clark into the Uncharted West*. New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Other resources that will greatly increase your understanding of both of these events include:

Video:

Check your local library for these Public Broadcasting System (PBS) videos:

Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery. (2 videos; 2-hrs. each)

Spaceflight (4 videos; 1 hr. each)

John Glenn, American Hero (1 hr. 30 min.)

Websites:

www.nasa.gov

www.lewisandclark.org