

Race to the Moon Chronology Game

This lesson is drawn from a more extensive lesson entitled [Race to the Moon!](#)

Topic: The “Space Race”

Grade Level: 2-5

Subject Area: Social Studies, ELA, Science

Time Required: 60 minutes

Goal

Students use an informational text and a time line to examine how Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union turned early space exploration into the “Space Race.”

Essential Question

How can a time line develop historical understanding?

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Place historical events in temporal order.
- Identify the temporal structure of a historical narrative or story.
- Identify key information about the “Space Race.”

Connections to Curriculum (Standards)

National History Standards

Historical Thinking Skills Standard 1 Chronological Thinking

- B. Identify the temporal structure of a historical narrative or story.
- E. Interpret data presented in time lines.
- F. Create time lines.

Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks

Guiding Principle 4: An effective history and social science education teaches students to think historically.

Guiding Principle 9: An effective history and social science education teaches students about using data analysis and digital tools as research and presentation techniques in the social sciences.

Standards for History and Social Science Practice (PS) 3. Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources.

Reading Standards for Informational Text [RI]

Prepared by the Department of Education and Public Programs, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

Prior Knowledge and Skills

This is a stand-alone lesson and does not require any specialized knowledge or skills. However, it may be useful to introduce the concepts of the Cold War and space exploration by showing students a map of the United States and the former Soviet Union and images of the Moon and the first moonwalk.

Historical Background

Early space exploration was fueled, in part, by the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Space was another venue for the two nations to demonstrate technological superiority and leadership.

Americans were shocked when the Soviet Union launched the *Sputnik* satellite in 1957, intensifying fears that the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union in technology and arms. Although the United States matched the feat with its own satellite a few months later, tensions grew when the Soviets reached another first by launching Yuri Gagarin into orbit on April 12, 1961. Although publicly congratulating the Soviet Union on achieving such a milestone, President Kennedy quickly sought ways to demonstrate American superiority. The solution: send a man to the Moon. The President escalated the space program and set the goal to send an astronaut to the Moon by the decade's end.

Materials

Student Handouts

- *“The “Space Race” in the 1960s”* historical narrative for students
- *Race to the Moon* Time line
- *Race to the Moon* Chronology Game

Procedure

In this lesson, students will read an informational text, examine a time line, and play a chronology game. The activities are drawn from a more extensive lesson entitled [Race to the Moon!](#)

Part I: Reading an Informational Text and Analyzing a Time Line

1. Have students read the historical narrative *The “Space Race” in the 1960s*. This could be done individually, in groups, or as a whole-class read-aloud.
2. After reading the narrative, have students answer a few reading comprehension questions such as:
 - What was the “Space Race”?
 - What two nations were involved in the “Space Race”?
 - Which nation had early success in the “Space Race”?
 - Which nation sent the first man to the Moon?
3. Have students analyze the time line to identify events referenced in the article.

Part II: Race to the Moon Chronology Game

1. The goal of the Race to the Moon Game is to place the events of the “Space Race” in the correct order. This game can be played with two or more players, as long as each player has a set of cards. It can be modified for a single player.
2. To prepare the game, students can cut out the squares and follow the directions to test their knowledge on the chronology of the “Space Race.” Students should use the timeline to check their answers.
3. Directions for game:
 - Students combine and shuffle the cards from each player together in one deck and place the deck face down in the center. Taking turns, each player chooses a card from the deck and places the card face up in front of them.
 - On the next round each player picks a new card and places the new card face up in front of them either before or after the first card so that the cards are in the correct chronological order.
 - Play continues until one player has correctly ordered all 11 events. If a player places an event in the wrong order, other players must call the player out and that card goes back into the main deck. The player remains in the game. If a player chooses a card they already have, place the card back in the deck and play continues to next player. There are four “Milestones” and “Roadblocks” cards; follow the directions on each card.
 - The first player to place all of the events in correct chronological order wins.

Additional Resources

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. (www.jfklibrary.org) The JFK Library’s web site hosts a variety of related materials such as an essay on the “Space Race,” audio and text of important speeches President Kennedy gave on space exploration, and correspondence between President Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon Johnson discussing the status of the United States’ space program in 1961.

NASA. (<http://www.nasa.gov/audience/foreducators/index.html>) NASA’s web site provides a wide range of resources for educators on space exploration, the race to the Moon, and current NASA projects.

We Choose the Moon. (<http://wechoosethemoon.org>) This web site, produced by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Apollo lunar landing. Visitors to the site may experience the lunar landing from liftoff to landing through animation, archival photos, video, and mission audio.

JFK Challenge: Free iPad App. (<https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/interactives>) The free JFK Challenge app for iPad brings American history to life for kids by turning them into astronauts and Peace Corps volunteers. Fly to the moon or help people around the world with this exciting offering from the JFK Library.

The “Space Race” in the 1960s



In May 1961, President Kennedy told Americans that he wanted to send an astronaut to the Moon. No one had been to the Moon and he wanted the United States to get there first. He wanted the United States to reach the Moon before the country Russia reached the Moon.

At this time the United States and Russia, also called the Soviet Union, raced to see who could do more in space. The two nations were fighting a Cold War against each other. In this war actions were important. Sending a man to the Moon first would show that the United States was a leader in the world.

The Soviet Union started the race before John F. Kennedy became President. In October 1957 they used a **rocket** to send the first **satellite** into space. It was called *Sputnik*. People in the United States were shocked when they heard about *Sputnik* because it showed that the Soviet Union had the science to send an object to space. The United States worked hard and sent its first satellite in January 1958.

After a few years, the Soviet Union surprised the United States again. On April 12, 1961, The Soviet Union sent the first man to space. His name was Yuri Gagarin and he **orbited** the earth one time. It took

him less than two hours to go all around the earth in his **spacecraft**. Americans were worried that the Soviet Union had better **technology** than the U.S. A few weeks after Gagarin's flight, the United States sent Alan Shepard into space, but Shepard did not orbit the earth.

Since the Soviet Union was winning "the Space Race," President Kennedy decided that the United States would try to go to the Moon first. The Soviet Union had the same goal. They went back and forth with new achievements. The United States finally sent John Glen to orbit the earth in 1962. The Soviet Union sent the first woman into space and was the first country to have a person go outside of a spacecraft in outer space on a **space walk**. In February 1966 the Soviet Union came one step closer to the Moon by landing the first **unmanned spacecraft** on the Moon.

It looked like the Soviet Union would win the race but the United States was able to pull ahead. On July 20, 1969, two Americans, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, landed a spacecraft on the Moon and walked on the Moon. The United States became the first – and only – country to have astronauts walk on the Moon. The Soviet Union never landed a man on the Moon. Instead, the country focused on using unmanned spacecraft to explore the Moon and built a **space station**. After years of competition, the race to the Moon was over.

Glossary

Rocket – a tube-shaped object filled with gases that can go into the air

Satellite – an object that is sent into space to orbit the earth

Orbit – to travel around a planet, Moon, or sun.

Spacecraft – a vehicle that can go into outer space

Technology – applied science

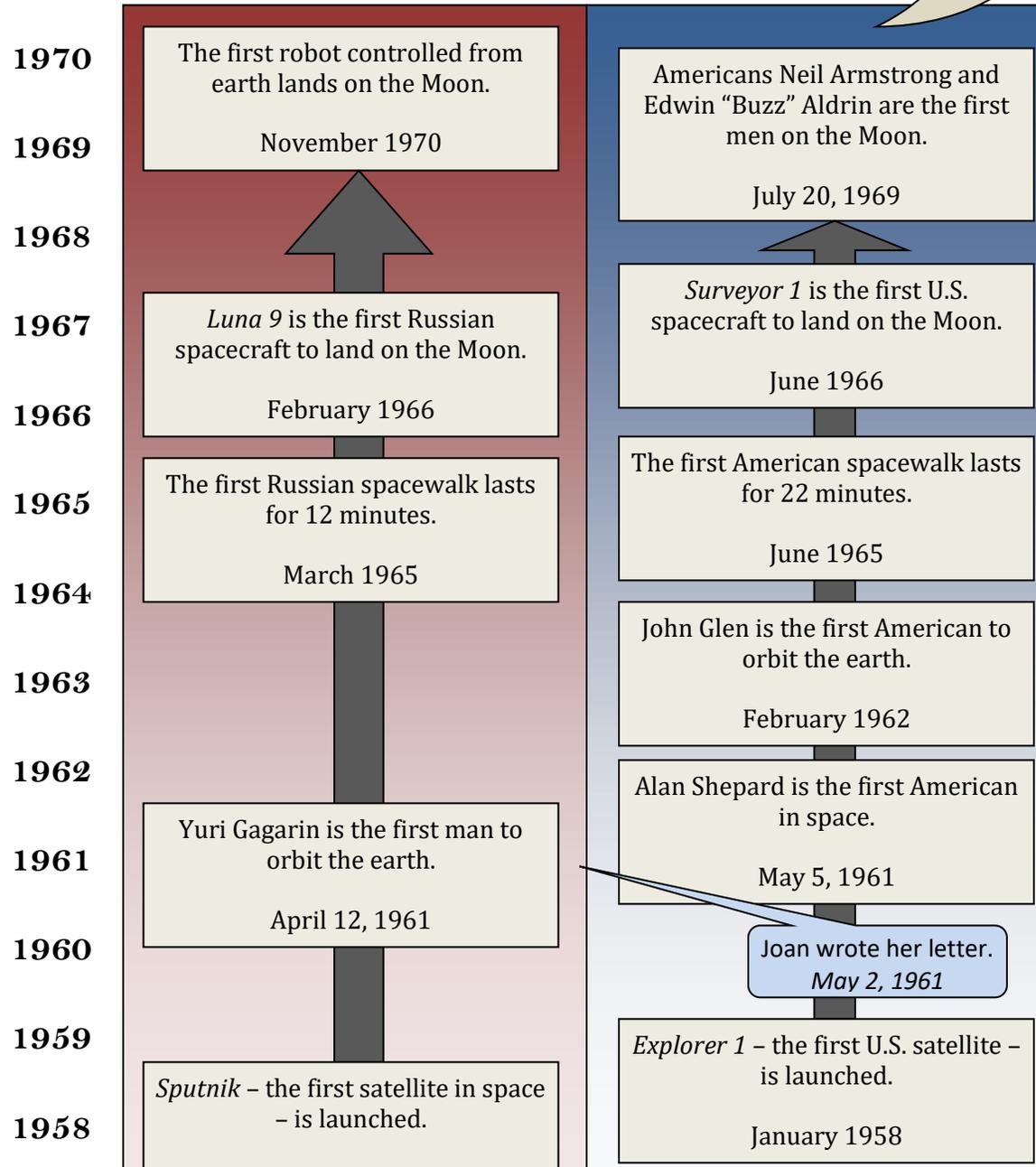
Space walk – to go outside a spacecraft in outer space

Unmanned Spacecraft – a vehicle in space without a person inside controlling it

Space Station – a structure in space that astronauts can stay in for long periods of time

Race to the Moon!

Timeline



Race to the Moon Chronology Game

Directions: The goal of this race to the moon is to place the events of the “Space Race” in the correct order. This game can be played with two or more players, as long as each player has a set of cards. Cut out the cards.

1. Combine and shuffle the cards from each player together in one deck and place the deck face down in the center. Taking turns, each player chooses a card from the deck and places the card face up in front of them.
2. On the next round each player picks a new card and places the new card face up in front of them either before or after the first card so that the cards are in the correct chronological order.
3. Play continues until one player has correctly ordered all 11 events. If a player places an event in the wrong order, other players must call the player out and that card goes back into the main deck. The player remains in the game. If a player chooses a card they already have, place the card back in the deck and play continues to next player. There are four “Milestones” and “Roadblocks” cards; follow the directions on each card.
4. The first player to place all of the events in correct chronological order wins.

Milestones & Roadblocks



<p><i>Milestone</i> President Kennedy asks Congress for more money for the moon landing project. Congress agrees. Choose another card.</p>	<p><i>Milestone</i> President Kennedy sends a telegram to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev congratulating him on Yuri Gagarin’s flight. Choose another card.</p>	<p><i>Roadblock</i> A broken part delays the next test on the lunar spacecraft. Lose a turn.</p>	<p><i>Roadblock</i> The Soviet Union shocks the United States by launching Sputnik. Lose a turn.</p>
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<p>John Glen orbits the earth.</p>	<p>The first Soviet space walk lasts 12 minutes.</p>	<p>The first American space walk lasts 22 minutes.</p>	<p>The <i>Luna 9</i> spacecraft lands on the moon.</p>
<p>The United States lands a spacecraft on the moon.</p>	<p>Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walk on the moon.</p>	<p>A robot explores the surface of the moon, controlled by a team of people on earth.</p>	<p>Alan Shepard makes a suborbital flight.</p>
<p>The Soviet Union launches Sputnik – the first satellite – into space.</p>	<p>The United States sends satellite Explorer 1 into space.</p>	<p>Yuri Gagarin orbits the earth.</p>	