

Performance Guide

for

Apollo: To The Moon

Written and Directed by
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Designed and Performed by
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A Guide for Teachers

Apollo: To The Moon

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This production is designed to introduce today's young people to the wonder and drama of the Apollo space program. For 1960's schoolchildren, Apollo was a symbol of an ever-expanding world. But to the schoolchildren of today, the Apollo space program is ancient history. We want young people to meet the characters of history who dared to dream the impossible – going to the moon. Their daring vastly expanded our knowledge of our universe and ourselves.

So Apollo: To The Moon is not only about science and history, but also about dreams – about setting your goals high and working to achieve them. All young people can identify with the desire to achieve something, no matter how grand or how small. They also know the challenge of discovering what it is within themselves that makes that achievement possible.

Fourth grade through high school teachers:

Apollo: To The Moon is 50 minutes long and will be followed by a discussion with the audience. The production can serve as an excellent catalyst for both pre-show and post-show activities, which can compliment many areas of your curriculum. We hope that the following synopsis and suggested activities will augment your students enjoyment of the production.

Kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers:

Your students will see a special, shorter version of Apollo: To The moon. Thirty-five minutes long, it focuses on the highlights of Scott's story. Actor Kevin Reese also begins the performance by talking with the students about their dreams. But, just like older students, yours will enjoy the performance even more if they are somewhat familiar with the subject of the production. So please use the following suggested activities, adapting them to the grade level of your students.

We welcome your feedback. Please send letters, artwork, critiques to:
Kevin Reese, 2023 Rosemont Ave. NW, Washington D.C. 20010

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A Synopsis

The play begins on the morning of the launch of Apollo 11, the historic space mission that will take the first person to the moon. We meet Scott Gibson, an astronomer, who expresses his life-long dream to go to the moon. As the rocket lifts off, we go back in time with Scott to when he was a young boy, already bursting with enthusiasm for the future of space travel. As he looks through his telescope, the twelve-year old Scott dreams of journeying to the mysterious planet “just beyond our reach.”

The play follows Scott, now a college student, to Christmas 1958 when President Eisenhower sends a Christmas message around the world via the first communications satellite. As the space age races ahead, so does Scott, who heads off to graduate school. There he meets James Webb, the director of NASA. As Scott listens to Webb speak of the excitement of the space race in 1961, he fantasizes about going through astronaut training. Realizing that only test pilots can become astronauts, Scott decides to commit all of his energy to becoming the greatest astronomer in the country. “I’ll be the one with the star map, that will get those test pilot astronauts to the moon.”

So Scott takes a job at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory where he works on the photographs that the unmanned lunar explorers, the Rangers, are sending back to earth. His research partner, Benny, does not share his enthusiasm about going to the moon but he does give Scott the best news of his life – that NASA is beginning to recruit science astronauts. Scott is overjoyed and goes to a recruitment speech by astronaut Gus Grissom. Grissom speaks of the dangers and challenges of becoming an astronaut. Scott is determined to apply.

Apollo: To The Moon follows Scott through the astronaut application process in the face of his boss’s skepticism about the manned space program; during the tragedy of the Apollo 1 fire; amid the questions of his sister Sarah about the importance of the space program “when there are so many problems on earth”; and through the wonder of the 1968 Christmas broadcast of Apollo 8 – the mission that sent back pictures of the earth as seen from the moon for the first time.

As Scott enters his final interview, he fantasizes about becoming the first scientist on the moon. We discover what happens to Scott’s dream as the play reaches its moving conclusion.

Mary Hall Surface
Director/ Playwright

Kevin Reese
Performer/Designer

Activities for Apollo: to The Moon

History

1. Create a timeline on the bulletin board in your classroom. Begin in 1958 when the United States launched its first communications satellite and take it to the 1969 landing on the moon. What were the highlights of the space program during this period? (Alan Shepard's flight, John Glenn's flight, the Apollo 1 tragedy, the Gemini spacewalks, etc.). Include the highlights of the Soviet space program. Include pictures and drawings. (Many are available through the NASA Education Resource Centers)
2. Add to your timeline the other important events of the period. Who was president? When did Martin Luther King win the Nobel Peace Prize? What was happening in the conflict in Vietnam? Add other notables – songs, movies, etc.
3. The central character of the play, Scott Gibson, is a fictitious character. He was created to represent all of the people who dreamed of becoming astronauts. But the other characters that the actor portrays are historical. Do you know who each of these people are: James Webb (the director of NASA in the 1960s); Gus Grissom (one of the “super seven” – the first group of astronauts selected); Werner Von Braun (the German rocket scientist whose designs impacted the American space program); and Lyndon Johnson?
4. Learn about the astronaut selection and training process. What physical skills are required? What emotional skills? What academic training and background? When were the first women chosen? The first African Americans?
5. In 1967, three Americans died in a test for the Apollo 1 flight. In 1986, seven astronauts died in the Challenger space shuttle disaster. And in 2003 seven more astronauts died on the Columbia space shuttle. How did these events affect the space program? Is the exploration of space worth these tragedies? What have been the risks and dangers for explorers throughout history?
6. Why do you think going to the moon became a race between the United States and the Soviet Union? What was the relationship between the USA and Russia during the 1950s and 60s? How is it different today? What other countries are playing a greater role in space exploration?

Production

1. In the play, one actor plays all of the parts. How can one actor change roles during a play? Using his voice? Different ways of moving? Changing his Costume?
2. The set of the play is very simple. It's a kind of sculpture. What do you think that it represents?
3. Apollo: to The Moon uses a sound score that includes popular music from the period. The play uses the music to create a mood and also help set the action of the play in time. Do you know the music of the Beatles, the Beach Boys, Steppenwolf? How is their music different from the popular music of today? How would you use popular music in a play?
4. The actor must create many different places (an office, a space craft, a car, -- to name just a few) using only two set pieces and a lot of imagination. Experiment with one chair, a cube, a beanbag. How many things can you make it become by using it imaginatively?

Themes and Ideas

1. Scott dreams of going to the moon from the time he is a little boy. What is your greatest dream? What can you do to try to reach your goal?
2. During the Apollo missions, we saw the earth for the first time from another planet. Can you imagine how that must have felt? To see ourselves – our planet, our home – for the first time?
3. What do you know about America's space program today? What projects are underway now? What are their goals? Do you agree with these goals?
4. What is the moon really like? People have been fascinated by the moon since the beginning of time. Why do you think that is? Can you find myths, folktales, works of visual art, poems, songs or stories about our "sister" planet?
5. What is your first memory of the moon? Do you notice when there is a full moon? A new moon? How are the ideas of poets and songwriters about the moon different from those of scientists? How are they the same? Can you write a poem or story that captures your feelings about the moon? Or about the stars, outer space or distant planets?
6. How much of outer space do you think will be explored in your lifetime? What do you think the explorers will find? What would you *like* them to find?