



## In the Shadow of the Moon

### Discussion Guide

Director: David Singleton  
Year: 2007  
Time: 100 min

**You might know this director from:**  
The Flaw (2011)

## FILM SUMMARY

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOON transports us back to a time when sending a man to the Moon was deemed impossible. For those who remember watching the landing on live television, this film will reawaken the wonder and awe. For those who were born afterward, IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOON captures the daring spirit and exhilarating adventure of the times, making history immediate, enthralling, and human.

Between 1968 and 1972, twenty-four people journeyed to the Moon. In this mesmerizing film, the surviving American astronauts who braved the Apollo missions reveal their memories and epiphanies in intimate interviews. Their joy and wonder is palpable, even in reflection. Their stories have been depicted in film and literature, but the simple honesty conveyed by these men highlight their humanity. They are heroes to us, but their humility underscores what they realized in space, seeing Earth from afar—that our home planet is fragile and precious, that mankind is a single entity, interconnected and unified with the rest of the universe.

Interviews are interwoven with archival footage (much of the NASA footage has never been shown before and was re-mastered for this film). These captivating scenes include hauntingly lovely moonscapes, thrilling launches, exploration of the Moon's surface, engineers and astronauts designing a space aircraft with tools and technology that seem quaint today, and the reactions of people around the world who came together to see for the first time—a man walking on the Moon.

## FILM THEMES

The film harkens to a time when the Apollo space missions helped define the U.S. as a bastion of optimism and progress, in contrast to what the U.S. represents in the world today.

### INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

At the start of the Space Race, the Soviets were ahead with Sputnik and Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space. But President Kennedy vowed to put a man on the Moon by the end of the decade. The Space Race was an extension of the Cold War, as the U.S. and Soviet Union competed to prove their superiority and dominance over the rest of the world. Kennedy, in the early part of the 60s, attempted to involve the Soviet Union in a cooperative effort, but was declined. With Apollo 11's success on July 20, 1969, the U.S. met their goal, but the achievement was recognized as an achievement for all mankind, unifying them for a brief moment in celebration and hope for the future.

### CULTURE OF THE TIMES

The '60s and '70s saw massive social change with the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the Vietnam War and its opposition. These years were also darkened by tragic assassinations, including that of Kennedy, who didn't live to see his dream realized. Against this backdrop, the Apollo missions must have seemed like a beacon for the future, embodying optimism and progress. Future Apollo flights were planned (Apollo 18-20), but popular support for NASA missions dimmed after the first Moon landing, as Apollo 11 ended the Space Race, declaring the U.S. as the winner.

### SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

In an interview, filmmaker David Sington said that one of his favorite scenes is the archival footage of engineers working with wooden models, protractors, and the simple technology of the past. Many of us may take for granted what was achieved in the 1960s, just a couple generations after the Wright brothers' first powered flight, without any of the technology available to us today. When Kennedy announced his daring goal by the decade's end, it may have seemed like bold, fanciful rhetoric. But in '69, the world witnessed what mankind was capable of, inspiring a generation of future engineers, scientists, and visionaries.

### THE EARTH - A PARADISE

As the astronauts looked at Earth from the Moon, they realized our planet's fragility and beauty. If only government leaders could see how petty the international squabbles seemed from that perspective. The astronauts' epiphanies might be difficult for us who are earthbound to fully understand, but the film reveals the vivid, living paradise that Earth is compared to the bleak, haunting emptiness of the Moon. Returning to Earth, the astronauts are in wonder of the people and life around them, and bemoan the pollution, violence, and destruction on our home planet.

**“Here men from the planet Earth first set foot upon the moon July 1969, A.D. We came in peace for all mankind.”**

Inscribed on a plaque, left on the Moon

**“The important achievement of Apollo was demonstrating that humanity is not forever chained to this planet and our visions go rather further than that and our opportunities are unlimited.”**

Neil Armstrong

## FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. What are your earliest memories of the Moon landing or of other space missions?
2. How did this film expand your understanding of these missions in their political, scientific, or humanist significance?
3. Many believe that in the 1960s, only the U.S. had the money and resources, the boldness and pioneering spirit to send a man to the Moon. How has the international reputation of the U.S. changed from then and now? What do you think the U.S. represents today?
4. Why do you think these 24 men are the only humans to have been to the Moon? Why weren't astronauts sent back to the Moon after the mid-1970s?
5. In the 1970s, NASA lost funding as U.S. taxpayers' money went toward the Vietnam War. What do you think would be possible today if the U.S. did not spend so much of its resources on national security and defense? Do you think security and defense take priority over scientific research?
6. The National Science Foundation, the National Endowment of the Arts, NASA, and other government-funded agencies have suffered massive budget cuts. Where would you want taxpayer funds to be allocated, and which ventures would you want to support?
7. The astronauts in the film refer to "the right stuff." Writer Tom Wolfe coined this phrase to describe the characteristics and qualities embodied by astronauts. What do you think it takes to be an astronaut? Did the 24 astronauts embody these qualities?
8. Science education for students and the general public remains a key issue today. Why do you think U.S. students lag behind in math and science performance in international rankings? Do you think this matters, why or why not?
9. Have you ever dedicated yourself to a venture that many deemed impossible or unrealistic? What propelled you forward, and did you meet your goal? If not, what did you gain from the experience?
10. How do the Apollo missions—the engineers, support staff, astronauts, and their families—inspire you today? What can you take from their experiences and carry with you through life?

## NOTES:

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## FILM FACTS:

- Astronauts on Apollo missions are allowed to take personal items in Astronaut Preference Kits (APK). Neil Armstrong's APK included pieces from the propeller and wing of the Wright brothers' 1903 airplane.
- Besides the U.S. flag and the plaque, the astronauts of Apollo 11 also left a memorial bag containing a gold olive branch and a silicon message disk, which held goodwill statements by Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and messages from 73 world leaders.
- Buzz Aldrin, in his book, disclosed that they also left Soviet medals that commemorated Cosmonauts Vladimir Komarov and Yuri Gagarin.
- After the Eagle landed, Aldrin recited from the Bible and took communion from a kit given to him by his pastor.
- Armstrong and Aldrin reported that the moon dust that their moonboots brought into the spacecraft smelled of "wet ashes in a fireplace" and "spent gunpowder."
- Lunar dust is created by meteoroids that crash onto the Moon's surface, heating and pulverizing the rock and dirt on the Moon. There is no wind or water to smooth the dust. Though it is fine-grained like powder, moon dust is still so jagged and sharp, it cuts like glass.
- Lunar dust coats the surface of the Moon and hovers up to 60 miles above, as part of its exosphere. The particles are bound by the Moon's gravity.
- After the astronauts of Apollo 11 returned to Earth, they were placed in quarantine for 3 weeks as a precaution, in case they brought back pathogens from the Moon.
- President Nixon had an alternative televised speech prepared in case Apollo 11 didn't succeed. The speech began: "Fate has ordained that the men who went to the moon to explore in peace will stay to rest in peace." If Armstrong and Aldrin had been unable to launch from the Moon, Houston was supposed to close communication and leave the men to their deaths.
- An estimated 600 million people around the world watched the 1969 Moon landing live on TV.
- Apollo missions 18-20 were planned, but 6 months after Apollo 11, NASA began canceling flights. The rockets and spacecraft that had been built are now on display in museums, never used.
- **IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOON** won the World Cinema Audience Award when it premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. In 2008, it was the first film to win the Sir Arthur Clarke Award for Best Film Presentation.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others a chance to learn about the Apollo missions and be inspired by the astronauts' bravery, their spirit, and the perspective they gained from the moon.
2. Visit NASA's website and spread the excitement and wonder of their projects through their social media channels and apps.
3. Support the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), the world's largest organization of science educators.
4. Visit and support your local science museum.