How can your courageous actions help to advance freedom in your life and the lives of others?

Courage is the capacity to overcome fear in order to do good.

In this lesson, students will consider the courage of Neil Armstrong, who led the Apollo 11 space mission and became the first man to walk on the moon. They will also consider how to cultivate and apply courage in their own lives.

- Students will evaluate Neil Armstrong’s courage during the early days of the space race.
- Students will analyze how courageous acts can promote progress.
- Students will apply their knowledge of courage to their own lives.

Attempts to land on the Moon were inextricably linked to Cold War tensions and competition as the United States and Russia began a “space race” in the 1950s and 1960s. In October 1957, the Russians sent a satellite, Sputnik, into orbit around the earth and then followed this launch by sending a dog into space. Congress soon created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to organize the American effort to get to space. In April 1961, the Russians again beat the Americans by sending the first human, Yuri Gagarin, into space. American Alan Shepard made the first U.S. spaceflight shortly after, and President John F. Kennedy addressed Congress the following month and issued a ringing challenge, stating, “I believe this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him home safely to earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space.”
BACKGROUND
Astronauts were highly-educated, logical, and experienced military test pilots who demonstrated courage, confidence, and competitiveness. They pushed limits and took risks, but not unnecessary ones. They were engineers and problem-solvers who had excellent study habits and a great deal of motivation to work very hard. Neil Armstrong, for example, grew up in Ohio and was an Eagle Scout. He studied aeronautical engineering at Purdue University and then flew jet fighters during the Korean War. He courageously worked to enhance human discovery, and in 1969 he was the first human to walk on the Moon.

VOCABULARY
- Space race
- Sputnik
- NASA
- Cosmonaut
- Ringing
- Commenced
- Deploy
- Ticker-tape
- Quarantine

INTRODUCE TEXT
Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the Compelling Question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

WALK-IN-THE-SHOES QUESTIONS
- As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
  - What challenges are you facing?
  - What fears or concerns might you have?
  - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS
- What contributions did Neil Armstrong and the other astronauts make towards the advancement of freedom through their demonstration of courage in the space race?
- In what ways did Armstrong’s courage contribute to his ability to lead the Apollo 11 mission?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Discuss the following questions with your students.
- What is the historical context of the narrative?
- What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
- How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
- How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
- How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
- What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
- Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
- How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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NARRATIVE

On July 5, 1969, three astronauts, Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong, and Michael Collins, were answering questions from reporters at a press conference about ten days before their historic trip aboard Apollo 11. When asked whether the mission was worth the billions of dollars it cost, Armstrong responded, “I think we’re going to the moon because it’s in the nature of the human being to face challenges. It’s by the nature of his deep inner soul.” His answer perfectly captured the curiosity that led humans to try to land on the moon and the courage that was needed by all the astronauts who flew in rockets into outer space.

As the sun rose in Florida on the morning of July 16, the heat and humidity were stifling with temperatures rising over 100 degrees at 7:30 a.m. An estimated one million spectators were too excited to notice the weather as they crowded the grounds, beaches, and water around the perimeter of the Cape Canaveral launch site at a distance of at least three and a half miles for safety. The three astronauts meanwhile had eaten a breakfast of steak and eggs with coffee.
and orange juice before donning their spacesuits and heading over to the launch pad. They rode an elevator to level 34, and at 6:54 a.m. they boarded their Apollo spacecraft atop the 363-foot high Saturn V rockets filled with six million pounds of freezing liquid propellant. They powered up and ran through their safety checklist as hundreds of scientists, engineers, and doctors worked in launch control to ensure safety and success.

The final countdown commenced, and the engines were ignited with an incredible blast. At 9:32 a.m., the rocket lifted off and soon pitched into its flight plan with the astronauts pinned into their seats by the growing G forces. They blasted into the heavens with an 800-foot trail of fire behind them and were soon rocketing at more than 6,000 m.p.h. above the Earth. Many American astronauts and Russian cosmonauts had died in the course of spaceflight, and Armstrong and his fellow astronauts were showing great courage attempting a feat no human had ever achieved as they traveled into the unknown. Countless minor technological or human errors could mean certain death in space.

The astronauts burned the second-stage rocket in the blackness of space in orbit around the Earth as they began to enjoy the magical feeling of weightlessness in space. Their spacecraft circled the Earth at over 17,500 m.p.h. until the third-stage rocket hurtled them out of Earth’s orbit at more than 24,000 m.p.h. toward the Moon.

After about 25 hours, Armstrong and his two fellow astronauts were halfway to the Moon. They slept, flew their spacecraft, and transmitted audio and visual images back to Earth, but there was nothing routine about their flight. They were all too aware that, in addition to the dangers of space travel, several probes from the United States and the Soviet Union either crashed into the Moon or skipped past it into deep space. Moreover, scientists did not know whether the Moon’s crust would hold the weight of their landing craft or how deep the dust was on the surface. Nevertheless, Armstrong and the crew confidently braved the dangers and proceeded on the mission. After 75 hours in space, Apollo 11 was caught in the Moon’s gravity and safely entered its orbit. On Sunday, July 20, Armstrong and Aldrin prepared the lunar lander and climbed aboard while Collins selflessly circled the Moon and waited for them to return. With countless hours of simulated training on Earth, Armstrong expertly piloted the craft and despite a malfunction, calmly put it down on the Moon. “The Eagle has landed,” he reported to billions of people back on Earth.

Armstrong was the first human being to walk on the Moon, and as he set foot down on the surface, he said, “That’s one small step for man. One giant leap for mankind.” Armstrong and Aldrin walked in the footsteps of trailblazing, brave discoverers who had conquered new frontiers for millennia in the human experience. Once Aldrin joined Armstrong, the pair stood on the surface of the Moon a quarter million miles from Earth. President Richard Nixon spoke to them, saying, “For people all over the world, I am sure they, too, join with Americans in recognizing what an immense feat this is.”

Armstrong and Aldrin leaped short distances in the reduced gravity of the Moon. They conducted scientific experiments, collected rocks and soil for analysis, and set up an American flag with wire because there was no air to make it appear to be flying proudly. After several
hours, it was time for the pair to return to the landing craft with their samples. Armstrong was too excited and too cold to sleep, so he lay there and contemplated their achievement.

The astronauts were not free from peril during their return trip. The most difficult challenge would be re-entering Earth’s atmosphere at the exact angle, or the spacecraft would skim off the atmosphere into space. Meanwhile, the heat shield would have to hold at temperatures nearing 4,000 degrees. The Russians had not solved the problems of re-entry, and the Americans would later lose a space shuttle during re-entry.

Apollo 11 successfully navigated re-entry and entered the atmosphere at nearly 25,000 m.p.h. They slowed until the parachutes deployed and then drifted down into the Pacific Ocean where they were rescued by a helicopter and swimmers from a U.S. aircraft carrier. Aldrin, Armstrong, and Collins were quarantined for a few weeks and then honored with a ticker-tape parade celebrating their heroic achievement. They courageously proved that humans could walk on the Moon and that bravery could achieve what many others previously thought impossible.