

# Young Portrait Explorers:

## Apollo 11 Astronauts

**Learning Objective:** Explore outer space and land on the moon with astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins.



### **Portrait Discussion:**

Spend 30 seconds looking from the top of the painting to the bottom.

**Foreground:** There are three portraits in the **foreground** (the part of the painting that appears closest to you). What do the portraits tell us about these people? The clothing tells us they are astronauts. They are (clockwise from the top) Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins, the **crew** (team) of the Apollo 11 spaceflight.

**Background:** The **background** (the part of the painting that appears farthest from you) shows the moon – the destination for the Apollo 11 crew.

The rest of the portrait shows the stages of the Apollo 11 mission in 1969. Start at the bottom left corner and move clockwise around the painting. Look for the following stages: launch into space, flying toward the moon, landing on the moon, and splashdown in the Pacific Ocean when the astronauts returned to earth.

**Symbols:** The artist included three important symbols to tell us about the mission. Try to spot them: the U.S. flag, the **NASA** (the organization in charge of rockets and space flight) symbol (a blue circle with the word NASA and red and white details), and the Apollo 11 symbol (a black circle with a bald eagle landing on the moon and the words APOLLO 11 at the top). Artists include symbols in portraits to help tell the stories behind them. What do these three symbols tell us?

**Movement:** This portrait is full of action. Where do you see movement? For example, the fire of the rocket taking off, or the splash of water as the crew lands in the ocean. What would those events have looked and sounded like? Look for the tiny figures of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon. Their movements were slow and quiet. Can you pretend to walk on the moon in a giant space suit?

**Historical Context:** *No one had been to the moon before July 1969, when Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins manned the Apollo 11 spaceflight. People across the world watched Armstrong become the first man to walk on the moon. He said, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."*

### **Related Children's Books:**

*Moonshot: The Flight of Apollo 11* by Brian Floca

*Go for the Moon: A Rocket, a Boy, and the First Moon Landing* by Chris Gall

*A Computer Called Katherine: How Katherine Johnson Helped Put America on the Moon* by Suzanne Slade

### **Activity: Be an Astronaut**

#### **Materials:**

Large paper bag, such as a grocery sack

Markers

Scissors

#### **Instructions:**

First, make your astronaut helmet out of a bag.

- With a grownup's help, cut a hole out of the front of the bag. This will be the see-through front of your helmet.
- Decorate your helmet with your own symbols, flags, animals, words – anything! Put on your helmet and act out the Apollo 11 journey from fiery launch, to landing on the moon, and finally the splashdown in the ocean.



*Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins* by Ronald Carl Anderson, oil on board, 1969  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Find the portrait on our website, here: [https://npg.si.edu/object/npg\\_NPG.70.36](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.70.36)