

The Space Race

"We have vowed that we shall see space filled not with weapons of mass destruction, but with instruments of knowledge and understanding"

-President Kennedy, Rice University, Houston, Texas, September 12, 1962



Cape Canaveral, 1962. President Kennedy and Astronaut John Glenn

President Kennedy was eager for the United States to lead the way in exploring space. The Soviet Union was ahead of the United States, having launched the first satellite Sputnik in 1957 and the first cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin to orbit around the earth in 1961. President Kennedy said, "No nation which expects to be the leader of other nations can expect to stay behind in this race for space." In 1961 Kennedy asked Congress to approve more than twenty two billion dollars for Project Apollo, which had the goal of landing an American man on the moon before the end of the decade.

Directions: Explore the telegram and the two memos below and answer the questions that follow:

A. On April 12, 1961 cosmonaut Yuri A. Gagarin from the Soviet Union orbited around the earth in 108 minutes. The same day President Kennedy wrote a telegram to Premier Nikita Khrushchev congratulating the Soviets on the first successful manned flight.

B. A few days later President Kennedy wrote a memo on April 20, 1961 to Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, who was the chairman of the Space Council.

C. Eight days later, Vice President Johnson responded to President Kennedy's memo.

1. In the telegram to Premier Nikita Khrushchev, how does President Kennedy say he would like the United States and the Soviet Union to work on exploring outer space?

2. In the memo to Vice President Lyndon Johnson, what is President Kennedy's main objective?

3. What is the main difference between what President Kennedy says in the telegram and what he says in the memo in terms of how the Americans and the Soviets should explore outer space?

4. Why do you think President Kennedy appears to be giving two conflicting statements?

5. How does Vice President Johnson connect the space race with the Cold War in his April 28th memo to President Kennedy?

6. What are Vice President Johnson's suggestions for the President?

Now, explore President Kennedy's May 25, 1961 *Special Message to Congress on Urgent National Needs*.