Leggi e ascolta.

The Apollo space program

On Monday 21\textsuperscript{st} July 1969, Apollo astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first people in history to walk on the Moon. But the race to the moon started eight years earlier: on 12\textsuperscript{th} April 1961, the Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin became the first person to go into space. Then on 5\textsuperscript{th} May 1961, Alan Shepard became the first American in space. Only twenty days later, President John F Kennedy gave his country a huge challenge: he wanted NASA to send a man to the Moon before the end of the 1960s! It looked impossible. Nobody knew how to send a spacecraft to the Moon – or how to come back!

NASA called the program to go to the Moon ‘Apollo’. Engineers designed a huge new rocket called the Saturn V rocket. Its job was to take a new type of spacecraft – called ‘Apollo’ – into space. The Saturn V rocket weighed 3,000 tonnes, and it’s still the largest rocket in history. It was as tall as the Statue of Liberty, in New York! Sadly, three astronauts died in a fire during a launch pad test of the first Apollo spacecraft. But the program continued.

In 1968, the Apollo 8 spacecraft orbited the Moon for the first time. The astronauts took some beautiful photos of the Moon and the Earth. Then finally, after two more Apollo missions, it was time to land on the moon!

On 19\textsuperscript{th} July, 1969, after a journey of three days and 350,000 kilometres, Apollo II began to orbit the Moon. The Apollo II spacecraft had two modules, called Columbia and Eagle. One astronaut, Michael Collins had to stay in Columbia and orbit the Moon. The other two astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, had to get into Eagle and go down to the surface of the Moon.
It was very dangerous to land on the Moon because there are big rocks on the surface. Armstrong and Aldrin had to find an area with no rocks. They didn’t want to crash on the Moon. Finally Neil Armstrong announced, ‘The Eagle has landed!’ A few hours later, he opened the door and he got out of the spacecraft.

Nine years after Kennedy’s challenge, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the surface of the Moon! The astronauts stayed on the Moon for more than a day. They left an American flag, took photos and collected 21 kilos of rocks.

Between 1969 and 1972, five more Apollo spacecraft and ten more astronauts landed on the Moon. But in the end, the program was too expensive to continue. The last Apollo spacecraft to visit the Moon was Apollo 17. It left the Moon on 14th December, 1972. Since then, nobody has been there.