



# Are We Really Going to the Moon Again?

A 10-foot-long electric cart sits parked in a valley on the moon. It has been sitting there for more than 30 years. The moon buggy was left there by astronauts in December 1972. That was the last time people stood on the Moon.

In the early days of space flight, people dreamed of colonies on the moon and trips to Mars or beyond. But for three **decades** all we've done is orbit Earth and come back. The International Space Station is only 356 miles above Earth. That's about the distance from Washington, D.C. to Boston, Massachusetts.

That's why fans of space exploration were so excited in January 2004 when President George W. Bush announced new plans for the the U.S. space program. He declared that the U.S. would send astronauts back to the moon by 2020, to stay for weeks or months. However, many experts doubt the President's plans will ever become a reality.

Only 12 human beings have ever walked on Earth's satellite. No one has ever spent more than three days there. In the time since the first moon missions, space flight has not become faster or cheaper. A program to send astronauts back there would take billions of dollars, much more than is currently in the NASA budget. That leads to the biggest question of all—would the American people support spending the money on such a project?

A moon program would need a new set of space vehicles. The Space Shuttle fleet has suffered two tragic accidents. The remaining

shuttles are old and due to be retired by 2010. Their replacement has been named the Crew Exploration Vehicle or CEV. The CEV would not be a reusable shuttle but would be launched into space on top of a rocket, like the Apollo capsules.

This tried-and-true method has been in use all this time by the Russian and European space agencies. By going back to it, NASA is admitting, without saying so, that the shuttle program was a mistake. To critics of the shuttle, this is a decision that should have been made years ago.

To build a colony on the moon would require even more money. It would be spread out over years and several missions. Robots would build the first stages and then astronauts would go to complete it. In the meantime, while President Bush announced grand plans, no new money has been put into the NASA budget. This has led some people to suspect that the announcement was just a political **gesture** and that the moon program will never happen.

Should it happen? Disasters like the **tsunami** in the Indian

Ocean, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, and the earthquake in Pakistan cry out for spending more money here on Earth. Poverty and disease are faced daily by billions of people. Can any government, including the United States, spend billions on a moon program and still address the needs of people here on our home planet? Unless our leaders can **assure** us that we can do both, it would be better to let the moon wait. After all, that moon buggy isn't going anywhere.



In 1972, Eugene Cernan took this moon buggy for a spin.

NASA (3)

## Reader's Response

- 1 How long has it been since people were last on the moon?
- 2 What does the writer suggest as the reason for President Bush's promise that we would return to the moon?
- 3 What is a more pressing need than going back to the moon, according to this writer?

## Writer's Response

- 1 How does the writer use facts to support her point? Give examples from the text.
- 2 Do you think the writer would describe an effort to return to the moon as unwise or impossible? Explain your answer.
- 3 What do you think is the author's purpose in writing this editorial? Does she expect readers to take specific action? Explain.

## Be the Writer

Do you agree with this writer? Write a letter to your U.S. representative or senator. State your opinion about funding space exploration and provide support for your argument. Remember to explain the opposite view and refute it (tell why it isn't right). It might be helpful to research the position of your representative or senator on the subject.

## Words to Know

**decades**      **tsunami**  
**gesture**      **assure**

## From the Writer

Have you heard the old saying “The pen is mightier than the sword”? One thing that makes the pen so powerful is that writers have the power to tell the truth in a way that is read and remembered for a long time. Classic literature is a great example of this. Many great novels and essays were intended as social commentary, making fun of—or shining a bright light—on situations and problems in the writer's culture. Often in the past, and sometimes still today, this has gotten writers in trouble. Nevertheless, their writings were remembered and helped change things. The short pamphlet *Common Sense* (by Thomas Paine) convinced many American colonists to fight for freedom against Britain. The novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* told the story of a slave family; it influenced many people to change their minds about slavery and begin to fight against it.

Facts and details can often paint a picture that is vivid enough to touch readers and lead them to the writer's point of view. This can be done without the writer “beating readers over the head” with outright emotional appeals.

The writer of “Are We Really Going to the Moon Again?” lines up the facts carefully. She pieces together a picture for the readers that helps them see her point of view clearly.

When you write, look for ways to paint this kind of picture for your readers. Let the facts speak for themselves when you can. Your readers will appreciate this gentler approach.