



HC: 978-1-68263-013-6

# Countdown: 2979 Days to the Moon

Written by Suzanne Slade

Illustrated by Thomas Gonzalez

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced that the United States would try to land a man on the Moon by the end of the decade. During the two thousand nine hundred seventy-nine days that followed his speech, eighteen astronauts climbed into spaceships. Three of them died before even leaving the ground. Eight rockets soared into space. And four hundred thousand people—engineers, technicians, mathematicians, scientists, and machinists—joined Project Apollo in hopes of making the dream a reality.

*Countdown* is the powerful story of the successes, failures, triumphs, tragedies, and lessons learned from Apollos 1 through 10 that led to the first Moon landing. It's told in powerful verse by award-winning author and former mechanical engineer Suzanne Slade and includes stunning illustrations from *New York Times* best-selling illustrator Thomas Gonzalez.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did you/do you want to be an astronaut? A rocket engineer? An astronomer? Why did you choose that dream?
2. *Countdown* tells the true story of the American effort to land the first man on the Moon, and one of the author's dreams is that her book inspires people to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first Moon landing. As we approach that milestone (July 20, 2019), why do you think we're celebrating? Do you think it's important?
3. The word *outrageous* means out of bounds, shocking, or beyond reasonable limits. How was President Kennedy's dream of landing a man on the Moon outrageous?
4. A *visionary* is someone who thinks about the future in a creative and imaginative way, someone with a powerful plan for change. Do you think Kennedy was a visionary? If so, how?
5. Why do you think President Kennedy's dream of landing a man on the Moon didn't die, even after he was assassinated?
6. (For the discussion leader) Read a passage from *Countdown*. (To the group) How do you feel when you hear/read the verse? Is the word choice significant? The pacing?
7. More than 400,000 people contributed to the Apollo program. Did you have any idea it took that many people to land a man on the Moon? When you think about that number, what comes to mind?
8. What's important about the book's theme of teamwork? What are the hardest/easiest parts of being part of a team?
9. What can we learn from the trial and error, the accomplishments and failures that ultimately led to landing a man on the Moon?
10. Many men and women sacrificed their lives—some died—for this goal. Do you think it was a mission worth this level of sacrifice? Why or why not?
11. When the author interviewed astronaut Alan Bean, the fourth man on the Moon, she said it was fascinating to hear about the one thing he wished he'd done on the Moon—he wished he'd smuggled a

football on board so he could throw an incredibly long pass on the Moon! What do you wish you could do on the Moon?

12. When Neil Armstrong landed on the Moon, he declared his first step to be “one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” What does that mean to you? What do you think it meant for America and the world?
13. President Kennedy dreamed of landing a man on the Moon 60 years ago this year. If you were in charge of our space program today, what would your dream be? Where would you want to go and explore?
14. Companies like Virgin Galactic, Space X, and others are trying to send private passengers like you into space. Would you want to go? Why or why not?
15. What do you like most about learning about science and/or space? Why?

## REVIEWS

★ “Elegant and informative, this is sure to attract casual browsers and true space nerds alike.”  
—*Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

★ “This well-researched title offers a stirring introduction to one of humankind’s most impressive undertakings.”  
—*Publishers Weekly*, STARRED REVIEW

★ “Stunning... Slade’s carefully crafted, often alliterative text, written in free verse, is both succinct and readable, drawing this large topic down to the most necessary and interesting facts with enough detail to excite young teens as well as adults who may have lived through the missions.... Truly out of this world.  
A must-buy for most poetry collections.”  
—*School Library Journal*, STARRED REVIEW

“A grand...tale about a magnificent effort. A handsomely packaged look back at an epochal achievement.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Will captivate and entertain young readers.”  
—*Shelf Awareness*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A mechanical engineer by degree, Suzanne Slade is the award-winning author of more than 100 books. Before beginning her writing career, Suzanne worked in the Mechanical/Propulsion Department at McDonnell Douglas Space Systems in Huntington Beach, California on Delta rockets, Titan rockets, and the Delta-Star spacecraft. While at MDSS, Suzanne worked with engineers who helped create the third stage of the Saturn V rocket, which launched the Apollo Moon missions.

[www.suzanneslade.com](http://www.suzanneslade.com)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Thomas Gonzalez was born in Cuba and moved to the United States as a ten-year-old child. After attending the Atlanta College of Art (now called Savannah College of Art and Design) he freelanced for a year and landed a position at the Coca-Cola Company, where he intended to work for just five years. Twenty-plus years later, having worked with major global brands and held several creative positions, he left and became an illustrator, designer, and portrait artist. He has illustrated a number of children’s books, including *Seven and a Half Tons of Steel*, *Toad Weather*, *The House on Dirty- third Street*, and *14 Cows for America*. He lives in Georgia, with his wife Noni and daughter Nina, and three awesome dogs.

[www.tomprints.com](http://www.tomprints.com)

  
**P E A C H T R E E**  
P U B L I S H E R S

phone 404-876-8761 • 800-241-0113  
fax 404-875-2578 • 800-875-8909  
[www.peachtree-online.com](http://www.peachtree-online.com)

updated 10/18/18