First Opinion: Earth to Space!


Ashleigh Morton

Imagine a world filled with adventure, astronauts, and space, and you have entered the literary world described by Buzz Aldrin and Robert Burleigh in their new picture books that celebrate the accomplishments in space travel. Look to the Stars by Aldrin and One Giant Leap by Burleigh are two children’s books that offer historical accounts of adventures in space travel. Both authors have mastered the art of bringing to life the never-ending challenges, jaw-dropping successes, and sobering tragedies of exploring the unknown.

Although both Aldrin and Burleigh take readers on a mind-blowing ride through space, the journeys are nothing alike. Look to the Stars offers an accurate account of humanity’s aspirations to travel to space and describes the history of space travel from conception to implementation. A focus on astronauts and space missions fills the pages of this book and offers detailed accounts of various space missions. This book is overflowing with wonderful images as well as informative and inspirational quotes from influential people in space travel, and it offers a direction for the future of space exploration. Look
to the Stars is an overall wonderfully drafted expression of the human desire to reach for the stars. In contrast, One Giant Leap spotlights the awe-inspiring details of the journey of astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins as they ventured to the moon. Burleigh’s writing allows the reader to experience the intense worries and emotions of the three astronauts as they work to complete their mission. The words on the page paint dramatic images in the reader’s mind of the monumental feat of walking on the moon and finally returning home to Earth.

Although Aldrin and Burleigh similarly celebrate various elements of space travel in their books, the differences are abundant. One difference is presented in the artistry. Both books offer a vast array of colorful artwork to support the storyline. Look to the Stars is filled with gouache watercolor illustrations by Wendell Minor of important events, inventions, and significant people, while Mike Wimmer’s full-color illustrations in One Giant Leap are more impressionistic, allowing the reader the opportunity to imagine what occurred and how the astronauts on the first moon flight felt. The factual information is divergent in style and content. Burleigh retells the events of the first landing on the moon in an exciting narrative that is easy to comprehend. Aldrin begins his narrative with Galileo and guides his reader through space travel toward that first moon trip.

Including Look to the Stars and One Giant Leap in the elementary science curriculum would be an asset to teachers focusing on earth and space science. Neither social studies nor science are frequently taught in the early elementary grades, so these books would offer teachers an opportunity to incorporate the history of U.S. space travel in the literacy curriculum. After introducing students to our solar system, teachers could even use these books to elaborate on how advancements in technology have allowed us to discover more about the atmosphere surrounding the world and travel further in space further than was first expected.

Literacy, science, history, and engineering are all represented in both books, allowing teachers to introduce the importance of engineering in space by discussing the design and development of rockets, spacecrafts, the space station, and space probes. History can be incorporated into these books by studying the development of space travel throughout history. Teachers can start with the development of the telescope for exploring space from earth. Then they can study the creation of the airplane by the Wright brothers, discuss placement of satellites in space, introduce the first astronauts, and explore the consequences of Neil Armstrong’s and Buzz Aldrin’s trip to the moon. Look to the Stars and One Giant Leap offer good information about space travel. Incorporating these two books into the science curriculum might offer teachers the opportunity to incorporate the teaching of literacy skills as well. Such inclusion might allow students experience reading nonfiction children’s books and give them examples of two different ways that nonfiction science materials can be presented. Upon completion of an earth and space
science unit, teachers could also ask students to use their new knowledge about space and space travel to write a book of their own about a trip to space.

**About the Author**

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