

Moon dust

On 20th July 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first men to walk on the Moon. They landed on the surface in the Lunar Module called the Eagle. In this text, the narrator is remembering watching the Moon landings on television as a small child.



It's coming up to 7:30 PM and dusk is falling. I can hear crickets and birds in the back garden, and the burble of the creek. The Moon's in the sky, a big silver full Moon, and I've been on the porch in my pyjamas, which have little blue space-ships on them, just drinking the sight in. They're up there. Up there. *There.* We've been watching the screen for an hour, because Neil Armstrong was due out at 7:00 PM, after he told NASA that he couldn't bear to hang around until midnight, much less sleep. The TV anchor* and various experts have been assuring us that everything is fine, though. It takes a while to get those big suits on.

Armstrong is late because stowing the dishes after dinner was never part of the practice routine and it's taken longer than anyone expected. The first men on the Moon are being delayed by dirty dishes: there's something wonderful about that. The Eagle is on a bright, rolling, crater-pocked plain. When they had a chance to take the scene in through the Lunar Module's (LM) tiny, triangular portholes, Aldrin exulted at the unreal clarity in this atmosphereless environment, with features on the distant horizon appearing close by, contrasting beautifully against the boundless black backdrop of infinity. Armstrong wondered at the peculiar play of light and colour on the tan surface. He thought it looked more inviting than hostile. He knows this will be his home for only twenty-one hours.

* presenter

Now, what do you say as you become the first human being to set foot on the Moon? Neil Armstrong is an astronaut, not a poet. The pressure is on. It's irritating, because, for him, the landing was the poetry and the taking off again his next major work. Still, as he thinks about it, he considers the paradox that it is such a small step, and yet... the laconic career pilot comes up with one of the most memorable lines ever offered in the English language.

The door won't budge and they don't want to force it, because you could poke a hole through Eagle at almost any point. The air pressure inside the cabin is holding it closed, so Armstrong peels the corner back gently and the last of the craft's oxygen screams into space as a rainbow of ice crystals. Aldrin holds the hatch open as the other man sinks to his knees and crawls through, until he is standing on Eagle's porch, surrounded only by Moon and space and the Earth which hangs above him.

He pulls a ring and a small TV camera lowers on a tray from the undercarriage and begins transmitting pictures home. A voice from Earth exclaims, "We're getting pictures on the TV!" And so we are: grainy and unearthly. Upside down at first, then flipped over. Wow. Armstrong tests his weight in one-sixth gravity and launches himself onto the LM's giant landing pad. He describes the surface as "very, very fine-grained as you get close to it... almost like a powder." Then:

"Okay, I'm going to step off the LM now."

There's still time for the rapacious Moon-bugs to grab him, but they don't. He tests the ground to make sure it will take his weight, then steps off the LM.

**"That's one small step for man,
one giant leap for mankind..."**

Neil Armstrong

He bounces, paws at the dust once more with his boot and finally lets go of Eagle, to be free of the Earth and all its creations. He walks hesitantly, unsteadily at first, like a toddler searching for the secrets of balance. He feels his way into the rolling gait that Moonwalking demands and takes some photos, until Mission Control reminds him about the "contingency" soil sample he's supposed to get in case of an emergency takeoff. At that moment, Aldrin chips in, too, and the commander snaps, "Right," as the press room back in Houston erupts with laughter, because it seems that nagging is nagging, even on the Moon. Fourteen minutes later, Aldrin joins him, cracking a joke about being careful not to lock the hatch on the way out - but all the same, he's covered in goose bumps as he steps away from Eagle. He likes the reduced gravity, is glad of its attention after the weightlessness of space, which feels lonesome to him, as though he's nowhere. He looks up at the half-dark Earth and can make out the slowly rotating shapes of North Africa and the Middle East, then returns his eyes to the Moon and realizes that the soil next to his boots has lain untroubled by life since before these continents existed.

I run out into the garden to bathe in the silky Moonlight and the blood seems to rush to my head. They're standing there now. They're walking on the Moon. I go back inside and President Nixon is on the phone to the astronauts.

"Hello Neil and Buzz, I'm talking to you by telephone from the Oval Room at the White House. And this certainly has to be the most historical phone call ever made from the White House..."

Images courtesy of NASA

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1. ...Aldrin **exulted** at the unreal clarity... (page 1)

Which word most closely matches the meaning of the word *exulted*?

Tick **one**.

- delighted
- spoke
- looked
- laughed

1 mark

2. Look at the paragraph beginning: *Now, what do you say ...*

Why was landing the Lunar Module like *poetry* for Armstrong?

1 mark

3. ..oxygen **screams** into space as a rainbow of ice crystals.

What does the word *screams* suggest about the way the ice crystals move?

1 mark

4. Armstrong walks *like a toddler searching for the secrets of balance*. (page 2)

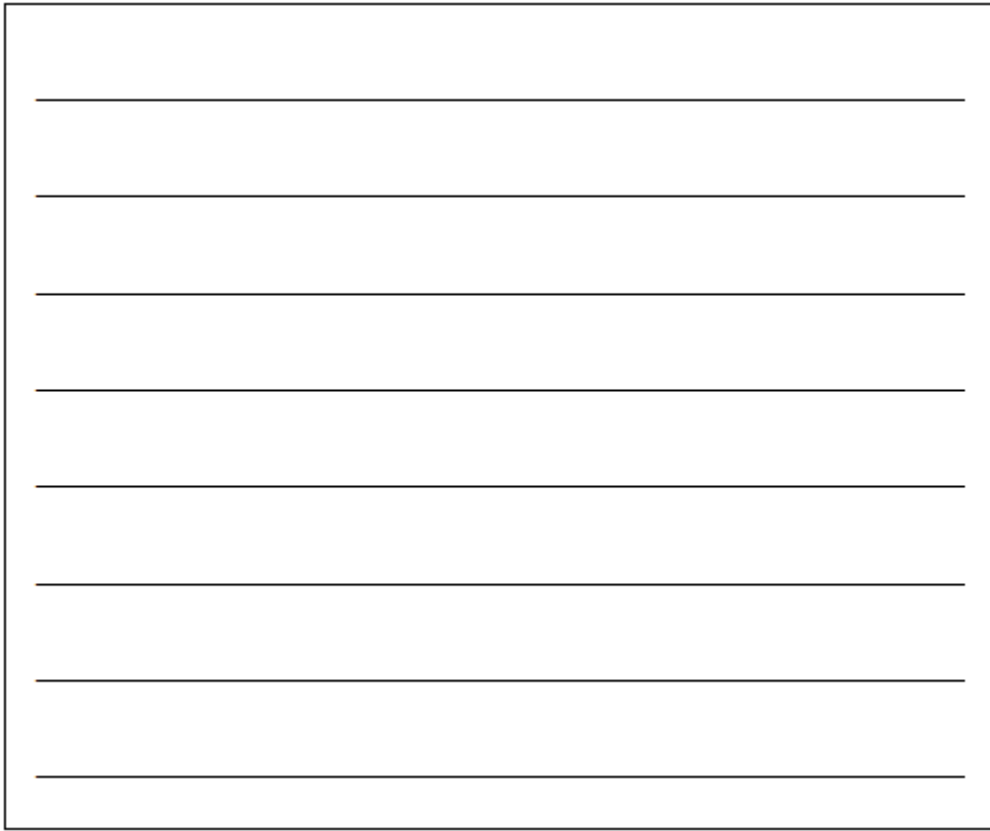
This tells us that Armstrong is unsteady.

What else might it suggest?

1 mark

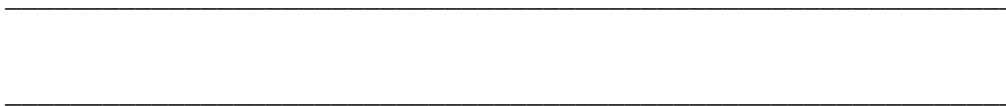
5. What do we learn about Aldrin's feelings on page 2?

Explain fully, referring to the text in your answer.



3 marks

6. Why is the phone call from the President in the final paragraph *the most historic telephone call ever made*?



1 mark

7. Tick one box in each row to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

	True	False
The astronauts experience less gravity on the Moon than in space.		
The first pictures of the Moon were upside down.		
The Lunar Module has round windows.		
Armstrong wasn't meant to come out until midnight.		

2 marks