Objectives

1. Engage students in the main ideas, language and rhetoric of John F. Kennedy's "We Choose to Go to the Moon" so that they are prepared to think, discuss, and write about this excerpt.

2. Practice and reinforce the following Grade 11-12 Common Core Standards for Speaking and Listening and for Reading and Writing in History and Social Studies:
   - **READING: HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES** – RH.11-12.1–5, 7–9
   - **WRITING: HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES** – WHST.11-12.1-2, 4-10
   - **SPEAKING AND LISTENING** – SL.11-12.1–6

Time

150 minutes (with up to an additional 140 minutes of extension possibilities)

Materials

SyncTV Premium Lesson on John F. Kennedy's “We Choose to Go to the Moon”

Overview

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, the first Earth-orbiting satellite. With that, the Space Race between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. was underway. Employing superior technology, the Russians took the early lead as Cold War strife between the two countries mounted, and in 1962, in a famous speech at Houston's Rice University, President John F. Kennedy issued an edict: put an American man on the moon before the end of the decade, and before the Soviets do. His speech roused the passions and imaginations of millions of Americans, and declared the Space Race a competition the U.S. was determined to win. Close inspection and discussion of this excerpt will prepare students to read the entire speech with interest and understanding as well as supply them with the vocabulary and key concepts with which to speak and write textually-rooted responses, consistent with the Common Core Standards for the high school grades.
Background (15 minutes)

1. **Watch the Preview** *(SL.11-12.1–3).* As a group, watch the video preview of the premium lesson. Ask students to share their impressions of what the excerpt will be about based on the preview, using the following questions to prompt discussion:

   a. Why was the United States competing with the Soviet Union in space travel? What factors motivated the two countries to enter into the Space Race?

   b. Watch the images and listen to the music in the preview. What sorts of feelings do the images and music evoke?

   c. Is space travel important, or trivial? What is its purpose? Why was getting a human being on the moon by the end of the 1960s such an important goal? Is its importance overstated?

Extension (additional 30 minutes)

   d. **Research** *(SL.11-12.1–2; WHST.11-12.7–9).* Have students research the Space Race, either by assigning them an excerpt from an appropriate history textbook or by having them do focused Internet research. Make sure students come to class prepared to discuss facts and information about the Space Race. How long did it last? What technical advances did the U.S. and U.S.S.R. make during this era? How did their competition ultimately yield greater advances in the field of space exploration?

Engaging the Text (90 minutes)

1. **Read the Text** (40 minutes)

   a. **Read and Annotate** *(RH.11-12.1–5, 8).* Ask students to read the introduction and excerpt from “We Choose to Go to the Moon.” Give students enough time to both read and annotate the text. If your classroom has a projector, you may want to model note-taking skills by reading and annotating the first paragraph as a class. Have students annotate the rest of the excerpt by writing questions about the information presented in the excerpt (with answers provided) using the annotation tool. These questions are visible to you after the students submit their writing assignments or beforehand if you use the “Mimic” function.

   b. **Discuss** *(SL.11-12.1–2; RH.11-12.1–5, 8).* What would a victory in the Space Race mean to the American psyche? Discuss the literal and symbolic significance of Kennedy’s proposal, as he lays it out in this excerpt. Why, according to Kennedy, is this mission so important? How did this mission take on a significance greater than its practical value?

Extension (additional 20 minutes)

   c. **Listen** *(SL.11-12.1–3; RH.11-12.1–5, 8).* As a class, listen to the audio reading of the text. Remember that this text was originally spoken, not written. How is the impact of hearing the text read different from reading it silently?

   d. **Review** *(ELL)* Encourage students who are learning English to replay sections of the recording that are difficult. Encourage them to listen to the pronunciation of unfamiliar words and practice repeating them. Suggest they create a personal
glossary of words from the excerpt that they would like to learn, writing them out and defining them.

e. **Comprehend** (*RH.11-12.1–5*). Either distribute the multiple-choice questions or read them aloud to the class. As a class, reread and discuss any passages of the text about which students remain unclear.

2. **Watch SyncTV (40 minutes)**

a. **Watch**. Either watch the SyncTV discussion associated with “We Choose to Go to the Moon” as a class or ask students to watch it on their individual computers.

b. **Focus** (*SL.11-12.3; RH.11-12.1–3, 8*). From 0:55-1:50 the SyncTV students analyze Kennedy’s argument about gaining scientific knowledge. Use this segment as a model for analyzing the merits and rhetoric of his argument.

c. **Focus** (*SL.11-12.3; RH.11-12.1-3, 9*) In the portion of the speech from 1:50-3:00, the SyncTV students use historical context to deduce Kennedy’s motivation in delivering this speech. Use this as a model for using contextual information to approach historical texts.

d. **Focus** (*SL.11-12.3; RH.11-12.1–3, 8*) From 3:45-4:40, the SyncTV students debate whether Kennedy’s logic was reasonable and whether his goals were worthwhile. Have students use this as a starting point for a similar debate of their own.

e. **Discuss** (*SL.11-12.1–6*). After students watch the model discussion, divide them into groups of 2 or 3. Move around the room monitoring the groups as students use the SyncTV episode as a model to discuss some of the following questions:

   i. Do you think that the acquisition of greater scientific knowledge was Kennedy’s true goal in entering the Space Race? Or were his goals more political than scientific? Explain your answer.

   ii. Who is the audience of this address? The students at Rice University? The people of the United States? Or does Kennedy intend for his address to reach a broader audience? Explain your answer.

   iii. What is significant about the location in which Kennedy delivered this address? Why do you think he chose this location, rather than delivering this speech from the capital?

   iv. Consider how Kennedy presents a proposed mission to the moon as an ‘adventure.’ How does his language convey thrill and excitement? Do you think this tactic is effective or not?

   v. Discuss how Kennedy uses fear to advance his aims. Do you find this element of Kennedy’s argument to be effective? Why might it have worked especially well in 1962, when this speech was delivered?

   vi. What is the purpose of quoting British explorer George Mallory? What is the meaning behind this quote, and what does it add to Kennedy’s speech?

**Extension (additional 45 minutes)**
f. **Write** *(WHST.11-12.1–2, 4–6).* In a 400-word essay, speculate on what the ramifications would have been if the Soviet Union had been first to put a human being on the moon. Do you think this would have had a significant effect on the Soviet Union as a global superpower? Why/why not? Use examples from the speech, as well as any outside knowledge or information. Students can complete the assignment as a quick write activity or go through the writing process of planning, revising, editing, and publishing. Allow time for students to share their thoughts and opinions with the class.

3. **Think (10 minutes)**
   a. **Respond** *(WHST.11-12.1–2).* Ask students to read the “Think” questions, watch the corresponding video clips, and respond to the questions.

4. **Write (45 minutes)**
   a. **Discuss** *(SL.11-12.1).* Whether you're assigning the writing portion of the lesson as homework or as an in-class writing assignment, read the prompt as a group, or have students read it individually, and then solicit questions regarding the prompt or the assignment expectations. Whichever prompt you have chosen, make sure you are clear about the assignment expectations and the rubric by which you and the other students will be evaluating them.
   
   b. **Organize** *(RH.11-12.1–5, 8; WHST.11-12.1–2, 5).* Ask students to go back and annotate the text with the prompt in mind. They should be organizing their thoughts and the points they’ll address in their writing as they make annotations. If you’ve worked on outlining or other organizational tools for writing, this is a good place to apply them.
   
   c. **Write** *(WHST.11-12.1–2, 4).* Have students complete and submit their writing responses.
   
   d. **Review** *(WHST.11-12.1–2, 4–6).* Use the StudySync “Review” feature to have students complete one to two evaluations of their peers’ work based on your chosen review rubric. Have the students look at the peer evaluations of their own writing. In pairs, ask the students to discuss briefly the peer evaluations. Suggested questions: What might you do differently in a revision? How might you strengthen the writing and the ideas?

**Extension (additional 45 minutes)**

   e. **Write** *(WHST.11-12.1–2, 4–6, 9–10).* For homework, have students write an essay using one of the prompts you did not choose to do in class. Students should publish their responses online.
   
   f. **Self-Assessment** *(WHST.11-12.5–6).* Use the StudySync assignment creation tool to create a “Writing” assignment that asks students to address the following prompt:

   Reread your essay and the reviews of your essay on “We Choose to Go to the Moon.” After reading these reviews, what do you believe were the greatest strengths of your essay? What were the greatest weaknesses? If you were to go back and write this essay again, what would you change about your writing process? What has writing this essay taught you about writing?
g. **Write a Letter** (*WHST.11-12.1, 4–6, 9*). In 2011, NASA officially ended its thirty-year Space Shuttle program, which sent over 300 astronauts into space over its duration. Write a letter to NASA, either commending their decision or calling for more money to be spent on space exploration (i.e., the re-opening of the Space Shuttle program). Make sure you back up your claim with supporting evidence, both from the excerpt of Kennedy's speech and your own outside research.
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Key Vocabulary

1. preeminence (n.) - the state of being more successful, powerful or better than others
2. strife (n.) - vocal, angry disagreement between two or more parties
3. incumbency (n.) - the duration of time a person holds an office or position
4. propulsion (n.) - the force that propels sth to move forward
5. celestial (adj.) - of or relating to the stars, heavens, sky, etc.
6. alloy (n.) - a metal produced by mixing a metal with another metal or other substance

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Kennedy begins his address by ___________.
   a. appealing to his audience
   b. thanking the previous speaker
   c. introducing himself
   d. telling an anecdote

2. “The greater our knowledge increases, the greater our ignorance unfolds.” Which of the following BEST paraphrases this quote from Kennedy’s speech?
   a. The more we learn, the less ignorant we become.
   b. The more we learn, the more we discover we don’t know.
   c. As we become smarter, we can become too satisfied with our knowledge.
   d. As our knowledge grows, we make more mistakes.

3. Kennedy uses all of the following political rhetoric EXCEPT ___________.
   a. creating fear that the other side will win
   b. comparing his goals to past achievements
   c. attacking the character of his adversary
   d. touting the proposal’s ability to create jobs

4. The NASA control station is located in ___________.
   a. Detroit
   b. Houston
   c. Florida
   d. St. Louis

5. “Space science, like nuclear science, has no conscience of its own.” Which of the following BEST expresses this quote’s meaning?
   a. The science of space is inherently bad and must be controlled.
   b. The science of space is similar to nuclear science in many ways.
   c. The science of space is still in its infancy and hasn’t been shaped yet.
   d. The science of space is not inherently good or bad; our actions determine that.

6. Kennedy ends his address with ___________.
   a. an invocation
   b. a rallying cry
   c. a question
d. a call to action

7. Kennedy describes space exploration as ___________.
   a. an exciting adventure
   b. potentially very dangerous
   c. good for the economy
   d. all of the above

8. When this speech was given, the U.S. considered itself ____________ Russia on the space exploration front.
   a. ahead of
   b. behind
   c. evenly matched with
   d. none of the above

9. In his speech, Kennedy invokes ____________ as a moment of American success and determination.
   a. the conquering and building of the United States
   b. the Industrial Revolution
   c. the country's innovation in nuclear power
   d. all of the above

10. Kennedy likely chose Rice as the setting to deliver this speech because ____________.
    a. it is in close proximity to NASA headquarters
    b. it is a technical institution, therefore a lot of the work force was likely to graduate from there
    c. both a and b
    d. neither a nor b

Answer Key

1. A
2. B
3. C
4. B
5. D
6. A
7. D
8. B
9. D
10. C
Further Assignments

1. Why was the period of strife between the United States and the Soviet Union deemed the “Cold War”? What is a “Cold War?” Have students research this key period in recent American history. What theories and disagreements were at the heart of their strife? What eventually caused this strife to subside? *(RH.11-12.7, 9; WHST.11-12.7, 9)*

2. What were some of the Soviet Union’s advances and achievements in the area of space exploration? Why wouldn’t the achievements in space exploration over the past 50 years have been possible without the innovation of the Russians? *(RH.11-12.7–9; WHST.11-12.7, 9)*

3. Watch the video clip of Kennedy delivering this speech before the crowd at Rice University. Does watching this video clip have a different effect than merely reading it? What sorts of oratory skills does Kennedy possess? Is he a good speaker? Why/why not? *(RH.11-12.7–9)*

4. Compare/contrast this speech with another famous speech by John F. Kennedy, his 1961 Inaugural Address. What similar arguments, beliefs and rhetorical techniques do the two speeches feature? Had the time between the two speeches changed any of the President’s aims or aspirations? *(RH.11-12.7–9)*

5. Can you think of a contemporary example of a similar competition between two world superpowers? In the case of the contemporary example, what’s more at stake: the literal or symbolic result? *(RH.11-12.7, 9)*

6. Kennedy begins his speech with a series of antonyms, or words with opposite meanings. Discuss with students that knowing the antonym of the word can sometimes help to illuminate its meaning. Write the words hope and fear and knowledge and ignorance on a board or projector and discuss their meaning. Then ask students to find another 8 words from the excerpt and create flashcards with the word they have chosen on one side and the antonym on the other. You may wish to give students a chance to quiz one another on antonyms. *(ELL)*