



CHRISTA

ORDINARY TO EXTRAORDINARY

ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

NH  PBS

CHRISTA IN THE CLASSROOM

Christa McAuliffe, America's first teacher selected for space, is the focus of a powerful documentary about creating a statue commemorating her remarkable legacy. The statue, unveiled September 2024 on the New Hampshire State House lawn was sculpted by renowned Idaho artist Benjamin Victor. This documentary celebrates Christa's life and her enduring legacy. Through interviews with former students, New Hampshire dignitaries, and educators, she is remembered as a teacher who believed that ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things.

As the first woman and educator commemorated with a statue on the New Hampshire State House lawn, Christa remains an inspiration to the next generation of dreamers and achievers.

WHO WAS CHRISTA MCAULIFFE?

Christa McAuliffe, the Concord, NH teacher, and astronaut who lost her life in the 1986 *Space Shuttle Challenger* disaster has become a symbol of dedication to teaching and learning.

Grade Level: Elementary to High School

Subjects: Social Studies, Language Arts

Objective: Learners will explore Christa McAuliffe's life and her impact on teaching and learning.

Activities

- o Have students create a timeline of Christa McAuliffe's life and career, highlighting key events such as her selection for the Space Shuttle mission, her training, and the aftermath of the disaster.
- o Have students write a brief reflection on what characteristics and circumstances made Christa McAuliffe a hero and inspiration to many and why her legacy has lasted so long.
- o Christa is known for saying, "I touch the future, I teach." Have students discuss what this quote means to them. Are there other professions or individuals that touch the future?
- o Have students research other figures in space exploration who have inspired students and future astronauts. This might be Sally Ride, John Glenn, or actor Nichelle Nichols, whose portrayal of Uhura in *Star Trek* inspired a young Mae Jemison to become an astronaut.
- o Have students create a tribute to teachers and educators, focusing on the legacy of Christa McAuliffe. They could write poems, design posters, or produce short videos.

CHRISTA MCAULIFFE AND THE TEACHER IN SPACE PROGRAM

The Teacher In Space Program was announced by President Ronald Reagan on August 27, 1984. Christa McAuliffe was one of over 11,000 teachers who applied for the program.



Grade Level: Middle School to High School

Subjects: Science, History, STEM

Objective: Learners will research the history of the Teacher in Space program and Christa McAuliffe's role in it.

Activities

- o Have students research the history of the Teacher in Space Program. Why did it start? Why did it end?
- o Have students investigate some of the issues surrounding space travel, both in the past and the present. Are there ethical considerations in sending civilians into space? How has space travel changed since the Space Shuttle era? What are some of the challenges facing space travel today?
- o What were the criteria for teachers applying for the program? Are there any additional criteria they would add to the list? If so, why?
- o Have students had any teachers they believe would be a good teacher in space? What do they think that teacher would bring to students if they had been part of the program?

TELLING STORIES WITH MEMORIALS AND STATUES

Who we honor with a statue in our public places can be dependent on a variety of different criteria including what we value, who is providing funding for a statue, who is advocating for a statue the contributions of the person being honored, and the importance of the person in telling the story of an event, a group, or an idea.

Who we honor with statues and memorials may change over time and with new evaluations of our history. New Hampshire is home to hundreds of statues of prominent figures not only in the state's history but also the history of the U.S. It is even home to statues of fictional characters.

CHRISTA MCAULIFFE REMEMBERED THROUGH ART

On February 14, 2023, New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu signed Executive Order 2023-02 establishing the Christa McAuliffe State House Memorial Commission. The commission was charged with leading an effort to honor teacher and astronaut Christa McAuliffe.

Artist Benjamin Victor was selected to design the memorial. Victor is the only living artist to have four sculptures on display in Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol. His statue of Christa McAuliffe is the first statue on the State House grounds honoring a woman.

STATUES AS SYMBOLS

Grade Level: Elementary School to High School

Subjects: History, Art

Objective: Understand the role of statues in honoring heroes and historical figures and events.

Activities

- o Discuss what makes someone a hero and what qualities we associate with heroes.
- o Show students images of famous statues and ask them why they think these figures were chosen to be honored in statue form. What do the statues symbolize? What do the statues say about both the subject of the statue and what we think is important to honor in a person?
- o Have students write a short paragraph on a person they think is a hero and why they think a statue would be an appropriate way to honor them.
- o Have students pick a particular statue and identify who or what the statue honors; why the statue was erected; when the statue was erected and if that influenced the decision to erect the statue; who was the artist; and what materials were used to create the statue.

- o Discuss how what society honors and values with statues may change over time. Have them research examples of statues that have sparked controversy and what choices were made by the community about those statues.
- o Have students design a statue to honor their own hero.
- o Ask students to imagine a future 100 years from now. What figures or events from today might be commemorated with statues?
- o Below is a list of some of the statues you can find at the New Hampshire Statehouse and the year they were erected. Have students research some of the details of how and why the statues were commissioned and erected.
 - Daniel Webster, 1886
 - Franklin Pierce, 1914
 - General John Stark, 1890
 - Commodore George Hamilton Perkins, 1902
 - John Gilbert Winant, 2017
 - John Parker Hale, 1892
- o Have students research the memorials and statues in their city or town. Who is honored with a statue, when was the statue erected, who was the artist, who led the drive to create the statue or memorial, what did the individual do that led to them being honored with a statue or memorial? Is there anyone that is not honored with a statue or memorial that should be?

THE CHALLENGER DISASTER AND ITS IMPACT

Following the *Challenger* disaster, space travel was halted for two years and the Teacher in Space Program was canceled.

Grade Level: Middle School to High School

Subjects: History, Ethics, Social Studies

Objective: Understand the *Challenger* disaster and its profound impact on space exploration and public perception.

Activities

- o Have students research who the rest of the Challenger crew were. What was their path to becoming astronauts? Are there memorials to these members of the crew?
- o Lead a class discussion on the risks of space exploration. Explore questions such as: Why are people willing to take these risks? How can we balance the pursuit of knowledge and exploration with safety?
- o Have students write a report on the events surrounding the Challenger disaster, its investigation, and the changes that were made to NASA's policies and procedures afterward.
- o Have students research how the loss of Christa McAuliffe and the other crew members affected the space program.
- o Have students read or listen to Ronald Reagan's speech following the *Challenger* disaster. What were some key points in his address? Why do they think it was important for him to give this speech?

Text of speech - reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-explosion-space-shuttle-challenger

Video of speech - youtube.com/watch?v=D-qilE4AAa-M

INSPIRATION

One of Christa McAuliffe's lasting legacies is how she has inspired teachers and students to pursue their dreams.

Grade Level: Elementary School to High School

Subjects: Art, Language Arts, History, Social Studies

Objective: Explore and express how individuals can inspire others to pursue new challenges.

Activities

- o Have students write an essay about their own dreams for the future. Where did their inspiration come from? Who has played a role in inspiring them? How do they think education can help them reach their goals?
- o Have students create a vision board that reflects their academic and personal goals.
- o Have students design a mission to send a teacher into space. What lessons would they have the teacher give? How would the teacher communicate with students using today's technology? What could the teacher do to inspire the next generation of explorers?
- o Christa McAuliffe is not the only teacher who has inspired students! Have students research other teachers who have had major impacts on the lives of their students. Teachers like Annie Sullivan, who taught Helen Keller, math teacher Jaime Escalante, or even fictional teachers like Ms. Frizzle!

MORE RESOURCES

You will find the full documentary and more resources at nhpbs.org/christa

Information about the Space Shuttle program can be found at nasa.gov/space-shuttle

