Apollo 13

by Dina Anastasio
from the motion screenplay by W. Broyles, Jr; A. Reinert and J. Sayles

SUMMARY

Apollo 13 is based on a true story about the American astronauts whose mission into space in April 1970 nearly ended in disaster.

The story begins on July 20, 1969, when Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the Moon. Astronaut Jim Lovell is sitting at home with his family, watching a fellow astronaut take the first step on the Moon’s surface. His five-year-old son, Jeffrey, asks him if he is really going to the Moon. Jim reminds him that he had been around the Moon on Apollo 8 and that he will be going to the Moon on Apollo 14.

That plan changes when astronaut Alan Shepard develops an ear infection and Jim Lovell is asked to go in his place on Apollo 13. Jeffrey wants his father to bring back a Moon rock for him, and Jim promises to try.

Just two days before the scheduled lift-off, one of the controllers, Ken Mattingly, becomes ill with measles. He is taken off the mission. Jack Swigert replaces Mattingly. Lovell is not happy about this, but he can do nothing. Once in flight, there are more problems and it looks like these three brave astronauts may not return to Earth. Fortunately, this is not how the story ends.

Five days after leaving Earth, a ship, the Iwo Jima, is waiting for them in the Pacific Ocean. The three astronauts are very tired and one of them is very sick, but they are just very relieved to be back on Earth. Jim Lovell does not have the Moon rock for his son, but Jeffrey no longer cares about a Moon rock – he is just very happy to have his father back home.

ABOUT THE MOVIE

The 1995 movie Apollo 13 was directed by Ron Howard, a child-actor of the early 1960s. Tom Hanks plays Jim Lovell, Kevin Bacon is Jack Swigert, Bill Paxton is Fred Haise, Gary Sinise is Ken Mattingly and Ed Harris plays Gene Kranz. Jim Lovell, the real Mission Commander of Apollo 13, plays the part of the captain of the USS Iwo Jima, and his wife, Marilyn, is one of the people in the grandstands at the launch in the movie. Ed Harris and Kathleen Quinlin were nominated for Oscars in the categories of Best Supporting Actor and Best Supporting Actress - neither won. However, the movie won Oscars for Best Film Editing and Best Sound. The Golden Globe Awards awarded Ron Howard for Best Director and both Ed Harris and Kathleen Quinlin for Best Supporting Actor and Actress.

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

Apollo 13 was the thirteenth in a series of missions called Apollo and it was supposed to have been the third lunar landing. The crew for this mission were James Lovell, Jr., Mission Commander, John Swigert, Jr., Command Module Pilot, and Fred Haise, Jr, Lunar Module Pilot. The mission was not able to explore the Moon, make a survey and take samples, nor use ‘the Apollo Lunar Surface Experiments Package’. After the oxygen tank explosion, the astronauts and Ground Control had to work quickly to get safely back to Earth. They were able, however, to photograph the Earth and take some lunar surface photos. It was the first Apollo mission requiring an emergency abort.

Jim Lovell was born on March 25, 1928 in Cleveland, Ohio. He was selected as an astronaut for NASA in 1962 and was the first man to journey twice to the Moon. He has received many special honors.

Jack Swigert was born on August 30, 1931 in Denver, Colorado. He was one of the 19 astronauts selected by NASA in 1966. From April 1973 to September 1977, he was Executive Director of the Committee on Science and Technology in the US House of Representatives. He died from cancer in 1982, a week before he was to start a new career in the US Congress.

Fred Haise, born November 14, 1933 in Mississippi, was also selected by NASA in 1966. He contributed much to NASA research until 1979. All three were awarded the Presidential Medal for Freedom in 1970.
ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1 Find out how many of your students have seen the movie Apollo 13. Put the students in pairs, if possible. Then write these words on the board and ask students to talk about them in pairs and say as much as they know about them to each other.

Neil Armstrong, Apollo 13, Cape Kennedy, Florida, Mission Control, Houston

2 Find out which students would like to be astronauts. Put the "astronauts" in front of the rest of the class. (Or choose two or three students.) Tell them that they will be going up in space in 30 minutes. The "astronauts" have to answer questions put to them by their classmates about how they feel, how their families feel, what will they miss, etc. Allow five to ten minutes to think of questions and answers.

3 Tell your students that the Apollo 13 mission left earth on April 13. The time was 13:13. This mission had problems in space. Ask them if in their countries there are worries about the number 13, or another number. Are some numbers bad luck? Discuss.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–5

1 Each chapter heading is a date or a date and time. Ask students to work in pairs and to write new chapter headings using words.

2 Make two photocopies of the six pictures in these chapters and cut them out. Cut out the captions separately. Put the students into two groups. One group gets the pictures, the other group gets the captions. The group with the captions read out one caption at a time, and the other group has to find the correct picture. They take the caption and put it with the picture. When they are finished, the other group checks to see if they are correct. Then students open their books to make sure.

Chapters 6–10

1 Put the students into two groups. Tell one group to imagine they are astronauts in a space ship that is having a lot of problems and the situation is getting dangerous. The other group are controllers in Mission Control. There is oxygen for only two astronauts in the lunar module for four days. Is it better to kill the other astronaut in the group so two astronauts can live and go back to Earth or is it better for all to die together? There is no other choice. Give the groups ten minutes to discuss this, then compare answers.

2 Ask students to work in groups and roleplay the events in Chapter 6. Students play these parts: Mission controllers, Jack, Fred, Jim, Gene Kranz.

Chapters 11–18

1 Divide the class into two teams. Put these dates and times on the board: April 14, April 15, April 16, 20:40, 23:00, 1:30; April 14, 5:14, 4:14, 04:14. Read sentences aloud. Students keep their books open and look for the answers. The first team to shout out the correct date and time when this happened, gets one point. They get another point if they can say who said this. The team with the most points at the end wins the game.

(Answers are given in parentheses)

(a) "They’re not going to tell us about their mistakes." (4/15, 1:30)
(b) The doctors were wrong about Ken. (4/14, 23:00)
(c) There were beds now in the rooms at Mission Control. (4/15, 1:30)
(d) "Did you read the controls before you changed them?" (4/15, 1:30)
(e) "We have sixteen hours of power. In sixteen hours, the men will die." (4/14, 20:40)
(f) They were on their way - to somewhere. (4/14, 20:40)
(g) "They won’t have the power for the engines and the parachutes." (4/16, 04:14)
(h) "Everything in the simulator has to be the same." (4/14, 23:00)
(i) "You didn’t make a mistake. I know that." (4/15, 1:30)
(j) "We’re trying to sleep…But it’s very cold!" (4/16, 04:14)
(k) People all over the world knew about Apollo 13 now. (4/14, 23:00)
(l) "We’re very tired. Fred is sick. We can’t think very well." (4/17, 5:14)

GLOSSARY

It will be useful if your students know these new words. They are practised in the Before You Read sections at the back of the book.

(Definitions are based on the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English)

Chapters 1–5

carryage (n) a vehicle with wheels that is pulled by a horse
client (n) someone who pays for services or advice
coffee (n) a long box in which someone is buried or cremated
elegant (adj) very beautiful and graceful
estate (n) a big country house and the land belonging to it
gambling (n) the practice of risking money on the result of something uncertain
peasant (n) someone who works on a farm and has little education
revoluntary (adj) connected with a political or social revolution
suicide (n) the act of killing oneself

Chapters 6–8

reindeer (n) a large deer with long wide horns
typhus (n) a serious infectious disease carried by insects
comrade (n) a friend and companion
labour gang (n) a team doing heavy physical work

Chapter 11

crawl (v) to move slowly, close to the ground
rags (n) torn pieces of clothing or cloth
wolf (n) a wild animal that looks like a large dog

Chapters 12–14

enlightenment (n) the state of understanding something clearly
Activities before reading the book

1. Look at the names of the chapters. Which chapter(s) do you think is about
   (a) the first man on the Moon?
   (b) problems for Apollo 13 before it leaves Earth?
   (c) Apollo 13 leaves Earth?
   (d) really bad problems with Apollo 13?
   (e) the day Apollo 13 returns to Earth?

2. Read the Introduction, then close your book and write the words below in the sentences.

   radio   oxygen   command module   space
   astronauts   controllers

   Apollo 13 is flying through (a) ....................... .
   The three (b) ....................... are Jim Lovell,
   Fred Haise, and Jack Swigert. Suddenly,
   something goes wrong. The (c) ....................... loses power. (d) ....................... is leaving the
   ship. Jack spoke to the (e) ....................... in
   Houston on the (f) ....................... . “Houston,
   we have a problem,” he said.

Activities while reading the book

Chapters 1 – 5

1. In Chapter 1, Jim tells Jeffrey about the astronauts on the Apollo missions. Write the
   numbers of the Apollo missions after the astronauts’ names.

   Astronauts   Apollo
   (a) Alan Shepard ..........
   (b) Neil Armstrong ..........
   (c) Pete Conrad ..........
   (d) Buzz Aldrin ..........
   (e) Fred Haise ..........
   (f) Jim Lovell ..........

2. In Chapter 2, Jim tells Jeffrey what will happen. Put the sentences into the correct order.

   (a) ........ W e’ll get back inside Aquarius and
   leave the Moon.
   (b) ........ A rocket will shoot us away from
   Earth.
   (c) ........ W e’ll go around the Moon.
   (d) ........ W e’ll get some rocks and take
   some photos.
   (e) ........ I will fly back to Earth.
   (f) ........ Aquarius will leave Odyssey.
   (g) ........ Some of the rocket engines will fall
   away from Apollo.
   (h) ........ Mr. Haise and I will get into
   Aquarius.
   (i) ........ W e’ll be close to the Moon and its
   gravity will pull us.
   (j) ........ Odyssey will carry us down to the
   Moon.

3. What do you know about
   (a) Alan Shepard?
   (b) Ken Mattingly, the command module pilot?
   (c) engine five?
   (d) Jim’s son, Jay?
   (e) cooking in space?

Chapters 6 – 10

1. A lot of things went wrong on Apollo 13. Match A with B to find six of the early
   problems.
A
(a) Oxygen tanks one and two
(b) The door on the lunar module
(c) Oxygen
(d) The lights on the controls
(e) The ship turned
(f) Four machines

B
........ went crazy!
........ broke.
........ around and around in space because there was no power.
........ didn’t move.
........ left the ship and it looked like smoke.
........ broke in the command module.

2 What is wrong with these ideas for getting the astronauts back to Earth? Which idea is the only possible answer?
(a) Use the engine behind the command module and shoot them back to Earth.
(b) Use the Moon’s gravity, so they don’t have to use the engine behind the command module.
(c) Go around the Moon and start the lunar module’s engines.

3 What is the astronauts biggest problem? Not enough food, water, or power? Why?

Chapters 11 – 18
1 Read each question, and circle Yes or No.
(a) Is Kranz the boss? YES NO
(b) Does he have all the answers to the problems? YES NO
(c) Does he know how much power the computer uses? YES NO
(d) Does he know how much power the lights use? YES NO
(e) Did Ken get the measles? YES NO
(f) Does Ken know more than the controllers about Apollo 13? YES NO
(g) Does Jack think the controllers are right? YES NO
(h) Did Jack read the controls before he changed them? YES NO
(i) Did Mission Control tell Jack, “Change the controls.”? YES NO
(j) Does Jim think that Jack made a mistake? YES NO

2 Answer these questions.
(a) Where do Ken and John find more power for the command module?
(b) Why do the astronauts have to move books, clothes, and the TV camera into the command module?
(c) Why were the astronauts almost sad when the lunar module went into space?
(d) Why do the astronauts need parachutes?
(e) What do Jeffrey and Jim learn about going to the Moon?

Activities after reading the book
1 Use the three words in one sentence.
(a) astronauts simulator Mission Control
(b) command module rocket space
(c) tank oxygen power
(d) rocks gravity Moon
(e) pilot controls dock

2 What did you learn from this Penguin Reader? Write a letter to a friend. Tell them what you liked (and didn’t like) about this book.