
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

NASA's last shuttle flight



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Recording of announcer

Five... four... we've gone for main engine start; we have main engine start...

Rob

A historic moment – that was the countdown to the launch of America's first space shuttle. Hello, I'm Rob.

Mike

And I'm Mike.

Rob

...and that moment, in April 1981, was a new era in space **exploration** when Space Shuttle Columbia took off from NASA's Kennedy Space Centre in Florida.

Mike

The shuttle service ran for 30 years - until NASA – the American space agency – closed it in 2011. And that's what we're talking about today as well as explaining some related vocabulary. Also, listen out for examples of present and past active and passive sentences.

Rob

In case you didn't know, a **space shuttle** is a spaceship that's designed to make repeated journeys between earth and space. NASA launched its final shuttle flight on the 8th July 2011. It was **the end of an era** for space travel.

Mike

Yes, the end of an era – so the end of a significant period of history.

Rob

Now, Russia and America have used **rockets** for space travel since the 1960s. Rockets are tube-shaped devices that use explosions to power them up into the air and into space. But NASA sent its first *reusable* space shuttles into space back in 1981. The final shuttle **mission** was its 135th shuttle flight. So, talking of developments in space travel, I've got a question for you to answer Mike. We all know that Neil Armstrong was the first man on the Moon, but how many people in total have walked on the moon so far? Is it:

- a) 12
- b) 18
- c) 24

Mike

I have no idea, a complete guess – c) 24.

Rob

We'll see if you're right at the end of the programme. Let's talk more now about the Space Shuttle. The first shuttle, Columbia, was launched into **orbit** over 30 years ago, and it **heralded** a new era.

Mike

To launch something means to put it into motion or put it into action. Here, the space shuttle was lifted off the ground and into space. And orbit here means travelling round and round the Earth. So NASA launched its first shuttle into orbit more than 30 years ago.

Rob

And **to herald** something means to announce that something new or important is happening – so at the time, the shuttle heralded a new era for space travel. Let's now hear from the BBC Science Correspondent, Pallab Ghosh who reported on NASA's final shuttle flight.

Mike

While you listen, try to pick up the words that the reporter uses to describe what people thought space travel would be like – and listen to hear how this was different from what actually happened...

BBC NASA report

Announcer

Five... four... we've gone for main engine start; we have main engine start. Lift off of America's first space shuttle!

BBC Reporter, Pallab Ghosh

Thirty years ago the first shuttle was launched into orbit.

Announcer

And the shuttle has cleared the tower.

BBC Reporter, Pallab Ghosh

Columbia was to herald a new era, where space travel was cheap and commonplace. That, of course, didn't happen. Instead, it was expensive and dangerous, resulting in two shuttles being destroyed in flight.

Rob

Pallab Ghosh said that with the launch of Columbia, people believed space travel would be cheap and **commonplace**, but in fact it was expensive and dangerous.

Mike

Commonplace means usual or everyday. People expected space travel to be a cheap, commonplace activity. But of course it wasn't – and it still isn't!

Rob

No, that's right. Space travel has always been a very expensive business. And dangerous too; two of the shuttles were destroyed in flight. The disasters killed 14 **astronauts**.

Mike

Astronauts are the people who are trained for space travel. So Rob, what happened to NASA's shuttle programme after it closed?

Rob

Well, nothing really – the programme was too expensive to continue; it cost around US\$4bn a year. Around 10,000 workers were made redundant – they lost their jobs in the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida, and around 5,000 more lost their jobs at the Johnson Space Centre in Texas.

Mike

OK, so a lot of people became unemployed with the end of the shuttle programme.

Rob

yes, that's right.

Mike

But what did this mean for future space travel Rob? Are there still astronauts going into space?

Rob

Well, yes, and NASA hopes that private companies will be able to take astronauts into space, though that probably won't happen for several years. And rockets are still launched into space these days: some of them are manned and some unmanned – meaning there are no people on them. They are controlled by computers back on earth. Right Mike, back to the question I set you earlier. I asked you: how many people in total have walked on the moon so far?

Mike

My guess was 24 people, so was I right?

Rob

I'm afraid you were wrong. In fact only 12 people have walked on the moon. Of course, Neil Armstrong was the first man on the moon in 1969 and Eugene Cernan was the last man to set foot on the moon in 1972. So it was only three years, really, that people actually walked on the moon. Does that surprise you?

Mike

Well, not really I guess, there are more interesting places to visit than the moon.

Rob

Really! More interesting than the moon?! Other planets I suppose. OK, Mike. Well, before we go, let's hear some of the words and phrases that we've used in this programme.

Mike

OK, we had:

exploration
space shuttle
the end of an era
rockets
mission
to launch
orbit
to herald
commonplace
astronaut

Rob

Thanks Mike. That's all for now. I hope you've enjoyed learning about the Space Shuttle and some related vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away

exploration	a journey to search and find out about new things
space shuttle	vehicle which NASA used to make repeated journeys into space
the end of an era	the end of a significant or historic period of time
rockets	tube-shaped devices which are powered by huge amounts of explosive gas and which are used to transport people and things into space
mission	(here) flight into space
to launch	(here) to lift upwards and away from the ground very powerfully
orbit	(here) move round and round a planet – here, the Earth
to herald	to announce that something new or important is happening
commonplace	something that happens or that people see regularly
astronaut	person who travels into space on a mission

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