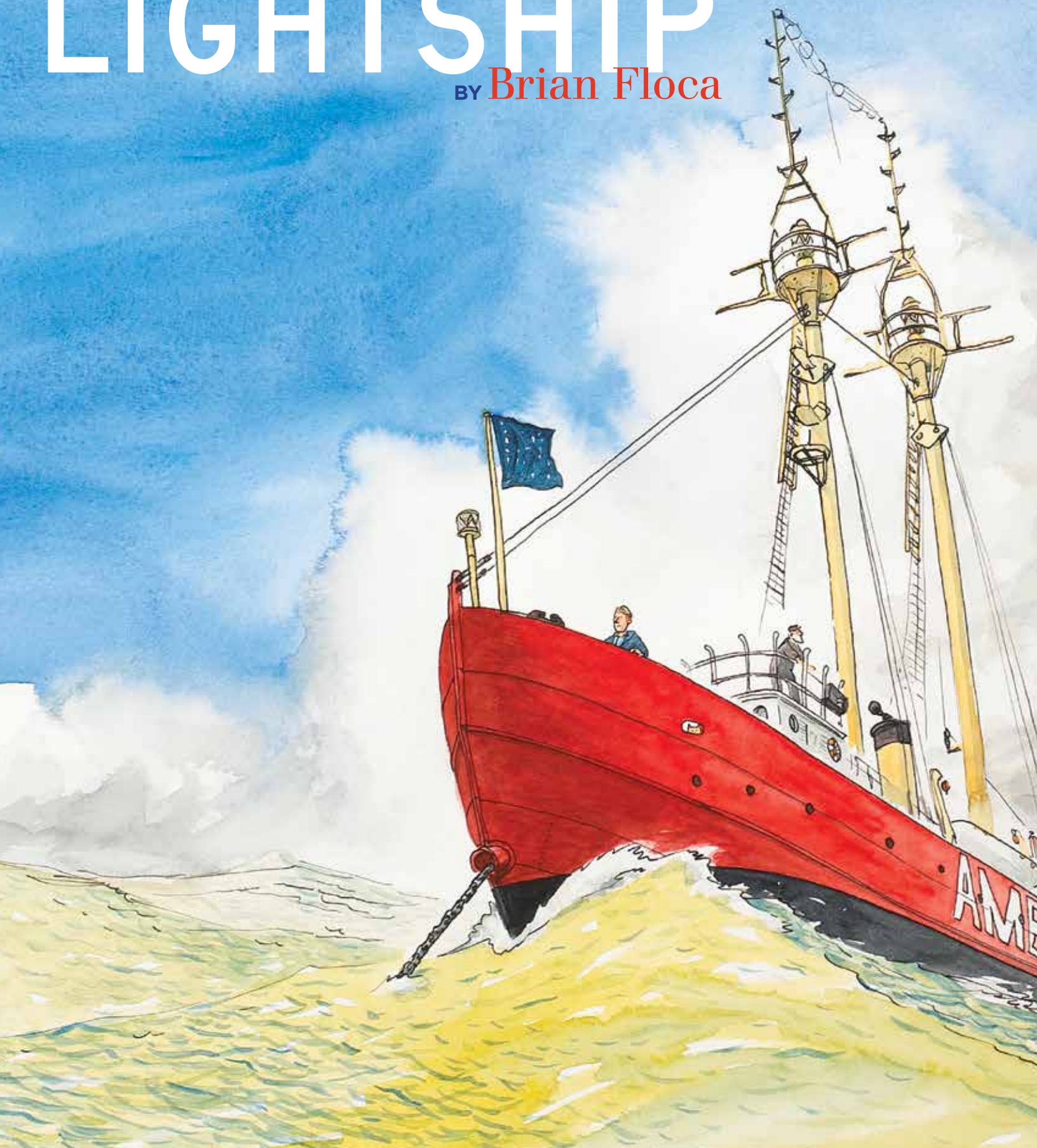
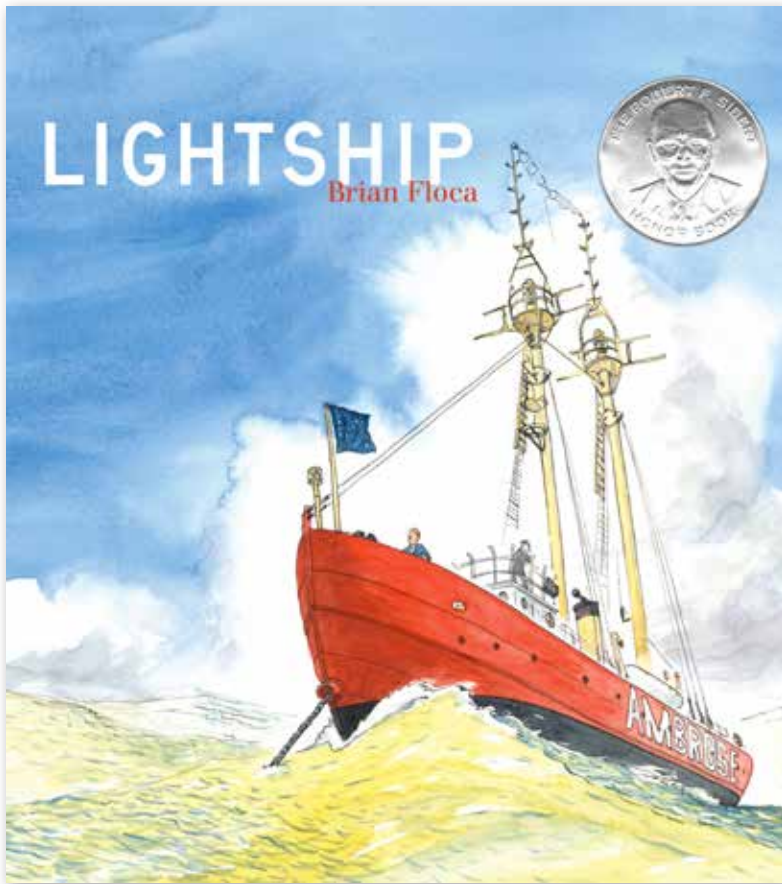


A Curriculum Guide to  
**LIGHTSHIP**  
BY Brian Floca





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Using a blend of well-crafted free verse and detailed watercolor and ink illustrations, *Lightship* is not only enjoyable to read and savor, but also useful as a mentor text for studying how writing and illustration work together to present information. *Lightship* successfully shows how ships served as “floating beacons” in places where lighthouses could not be built. An Author’s Note at the end of the book provides additional historical background and explains why lightships have now all been retired, bringing the story of *Lightship* up to date.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For more information about lightships, visit the following websites:

- The United States Coast Guard provides an illustrated history of US lightships, recollections of crewmen, and photographs of lightships at: [USCG.mil/history/Lightship\\_Index.asp](http://USCG.mil/history/Lightship_Index.asp)
- Lighthouse Friends provides information about the Ambrose Lightship featured in *Lightship* at: [LighthouseFriends.com/light.asp?ID=587](http://LighthouseFriends.com/light.asp?ID=587)
- For a video showing the *Ambrose* going to a shipyard in Staten Island for repairs: [YouTube.com/watch?v=NMvo3HEBfg](http://YouTube.com/watch?v=NMvo3HEBfg)
- For a video showing the Nantucket Lightship heading out to sea in 1936: [BritishPathe.com/video/making-the-sea-lanes-safe-aka-making-the-sea-laes/query/nantucket+lightship](http://BritishPathe.com/video/making-the-sea-lanes-safe-aka-making-the-sea-laes/query/nantucket+lightship)
- Find additional links and information at Brian Floca’s website: [BrianFloca.com/LightshipExtras.html](http://BrianFloca.com/LightshipExtras.html)



## SUMMARY

*Lightship* describes life on board a ship that once performed an essential job—that of a floating lighthouse—but no longer sails. Lightships once provided guidance to other ships by using their bright lights, loud horns, and powerful radio signals, both to mark shipping channels and to warn of dangers such as hidden rocks, reefs, or wreckage lurking in the water. In dangerous weather and in potentially hazardous locations, a lightship held its place—never moving, always on the lookout, and ready to warn other ships.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

## KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS.

The Common Core State Standards emphasize helping students to develop the ability to identify the main idea in a text and the details that support this idea. The activities below reflect these standards:

**RI.K-3.1:** Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

**RI.K-3.2:** Identify the main topic and retell key details.

**RI.K-3.3:** Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

### 1. DISCUSSING THE MAIN IDEA AND KEY DETAILS

After reading the book, discuss the main idea, which is introduced in the first sentence:

**Here is a ship  
that holds her place.**

Explain the meaning of this line. The questions below will help you explore this idea in more detail by using the *5 Ws* and *How?* to gather information.

- **Who** helps the ship hold her place?
- **What** does it mean to “hold to one sure spot”?
- **When** does the ship use its horn and its light?
- **Where** would a lightship be needed?
- **Why** does the ship stay in one place?
- **How** does the ship manage to stay in one place?

### 2. PREPARING AND USING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Have students use the *5 Ws* and *How?* to prepare interview questions for the captain and crew of the *Ambrose*. Have a few volunteers pretend to be the captain and the crew. The rest of the class should prepare the questions. Hold the interview, encouraging the students to use details from the book to both ask and answer questions. Here are a few sample questions to get you started:

- Why don't you travel from place to place?
- What is it like to live in a small space with the waves rocking the ship?
- What happens when another ship comes too close?
- Why does the crew sometimes have to reset the anchor?
- How do you get mail?
- Who keeps the machinery running? How?
- Why do you have a cat on board?



### 3. THE *AMBROSE* HAS A SPECIAL JOB

The *Ambrose* is not like other ships. It does not do what other ships do. In the chart below, list the things the *Ambrose* does, and those things it does not do. A few items are already listed on the chart.

#### What the *Ambrose* Does

#### What the *Ambrose* Does Not Do

Holds her place	Sail from port to port
Waits	Carry passengers, mail, or packages
The crew uses her horn when there is fog.	Drop anchor anywhere

Use the chart to discuss how the *Ambrose* is different from other ships.

## CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

The Common Core State Standards focus on understanding words and phrases that appeal to the senses and contribute to the meaning of a text.

The activities below emphasize the following standards:

**RL.1.4:** Identify words and phrases that suggest feelings, appeal to the senses, and supply meaning.

**RI.1–3.5:** Know and use various text features to locate key facts or information.



### 1. Building Job-Related Vocabulary

*Lightship* introduces readers to words that describe the jobs done by different members of the crew. For example, the *oiler* keeps the machines clean and running. Using the pictures and the words in the book, have students explain the job of each of the following members of the crew:

Crew Member	Job
Helmsman	
Oiler	
Engineer	
Deckhand	
Fireman ( <i>but not the kind that puts out fires</i> )	
Radioman	
Messman ( <i>check a dictionary</i> )	
Cook	
Cat	

Ask the students to make an illustrated glossary, explaining each job in writing and illustrating it.

## TAKING A CLOSE LOOK AT WORDS AND PHRASES

The author uses well-crafted words and phrases to describe the experience of being on a lightship. Three techniques are illustrated below—repetition of words and phrases, repetition of sentences, and alliteration. Read each example below aloud and discuss how the language helps you understand the experience of being on a lightship. Then look for additional examples of these techniques.

### REPETITION OF WORDS AND PHRASES.

Repeating words and phrases provides emphasis and rhythm. Here is an example of emphasis. The author wants us to know that the ship is crowded, not roomy.

Her crew lives  
in small spaces,  
works in small spaces

Here's an example of how repetition provides rhythm:

Always they hear  
the creaking of the ship  
and the slow  
slap, slap, slap  
of water on the hull.



### REPETITION OF SENTENCES.

The author repeats these words—once near the beginning of the book and once near the end to emphasize the special job of the lightship:

She does not sail from port to port.  
She does not carry passengers  
or mail or packages.  
She holds to one sure spot  
as other ships sail by.  
She waits.

### ALLITERATION.

Repeating initial consonant sounds helps make language memorable and appealing. Here are a few examples.

Always there is  
the salt smell of the sea . . .

They sound their horn  
so loud the whole ship  
SHAKES.

Try using repetition and alliteration in your writing. See if it helps you emphasize your ideas.



2. Examine the following text features. What information do these features provide? Write down what you notice. Then try using these features in your writing.

Text Feature:	What You Notice:
Front Cover	
Back Cover	
Title Page	
Acknowledgments	
Speech bubbles	
Font	
Author's Note	

Can you find the cat on many of the pages? Look carefully.



### **INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS.**

The activities that follow draw attention to the integration of knowledge and ideas by having students carefully examine how a diagram contributes to and clarifies a text. It meets the following Common Core State Standard:

**RI.2–4.7:** Explain how a diagram contributes to and clarifies a text.

## 1. STUDYING A LABELED DIAGRAM.

*Lightship* begins with a labeled diagram of the ship. Notice that the outside of the ship has been peeled away so that we can look inside. Use this diagram to find additional information about places that are mentioned and illustrated in the main part of the book. For each location below, tell what information is provided in the diagram and what information is provided in the text and illustrations. Complete the following chart as a class. Discuss how diagrams work together with written text and illustrations to help us understand key ideas. The examples below show that both the diagram and the text and illustrations contribute to our understanding of lightships.

Item/Place	Information in Written Text and Illustration	Information in Diagram
The horn (foghorn)	The horn is above the deck. It is used when there is a fog. The sound is so loud it makes the ship shake.	The horn is located on a tall column in the middle of the ship. It is between the two lanterns and above the engine room.
The light (lantern)	The lantern is bright enough to shine through the fog.	There are two lanterns, both on high masts for greater visibility. One is an extra, or auxiliary. A radio beacon antenna is attached to the top of each lantern
The crew's quarters		
The pilot house where the helmsman steers the ship		
The anchor		
The area below deck where the engines and the generators are located		

After studying the labeled diagram of a lightship, challenge the students to make a labeled diagram of an object that interests them. This could be an animal (elephant, whale, snake), plant (rose, pumpkin, tree), or an invention (bicycle, kite, lightbulb). Provide time for the research needed to complete this activity. There are many examples of other labeled diagrams on the Internet to examine as models. Search Google Images and type in *labeled diagrams*. Encourage students to also write about the subject of their diagram, adding additional information.



## WRITING

The Common Core State Standards emphasize writing opinion pieces, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives. The writing activities below reflect the following standards:

**W.1–3.1:** Write opinion pieces on a topic, supporting a point of view with reasons.

**W.1–3.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to introduce a topic, use facts to develop it, and provide a conclusion.

**W.1–3.3:** Write a narrative, explaining two or more events in sequence.

### 1. Writing an Opinion Piece

Ask students to write their opinion of *Lightship*. Discuss and post the following steps to follow:

1. Name the book you are writing about and its author.
2. Give your opinion of the book.
3. Give a reason for your opinion.
4. End in an interesting way.

### 2. Writing to Inform

As the captain of the *Ambrose*, explain how you and your crew keep your ship in its place so that it can guide other ships safely home.

### 3. Writing a Narrative

Explain what your day would be like if you were a member of the crew of the *Ambrose*. What is your job? What do you do in the morning, afternoon, and evening? Illustrate your story.

## EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

### 1. Text-to-Text Connection

Read Carl Sandburg's poem *Fog*. Explain if you think Brian Floca was thinking about this poem when he wrote and illustrated the pages below.

And when the fog  
comes creeping in,  
the crew knows what to do.

**Fog**  
**BY CARL SANDBURG**

The fog comes  
on little cat feet.

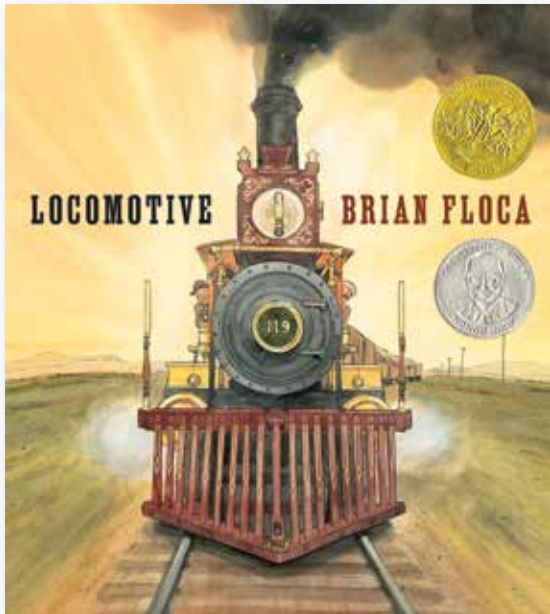
It sits looking  
over harbor and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.

## FIND OUT MORE ABOUT BRIAN FLOCA.

- Visit his website at [BrianFloca.com](http://BrianFloca.com)
- Watch Brian Floca discuss his latest book, *Locomotive*, at [FCPS.edu/fairfaxnetwork/mta/floca.html](http://FCPS.edu/fairfaxnetwork/mta/floca.html)

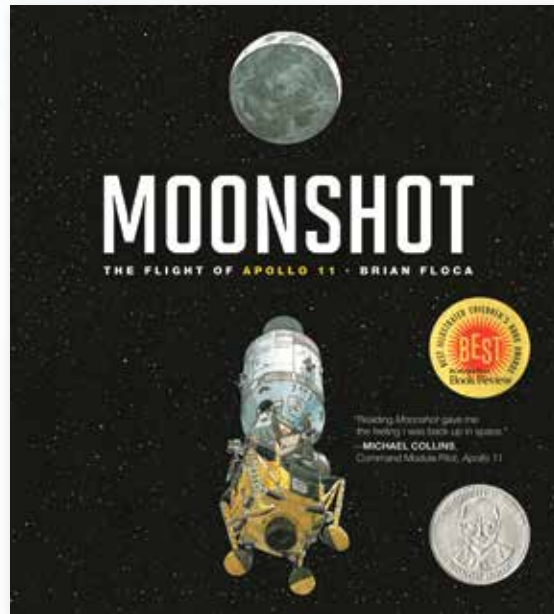
## READ OTHER BOOKS BY BRIAN FLOCA

### *Locomotive*

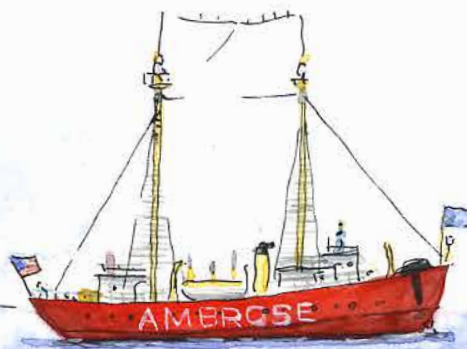


Join a family as they ride a steam locomotive from Omaha, Nebraska, to San Francisco, California. See what it was like to ride the Transcontinental Railroad.

### *Moonshot*



Take a trip to the moon with the astronauts of *Apollo 11*. Join Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Buzz Aldrin.



Guide written in 2014 by Myra Zarnowski, a professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, CUNY.

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