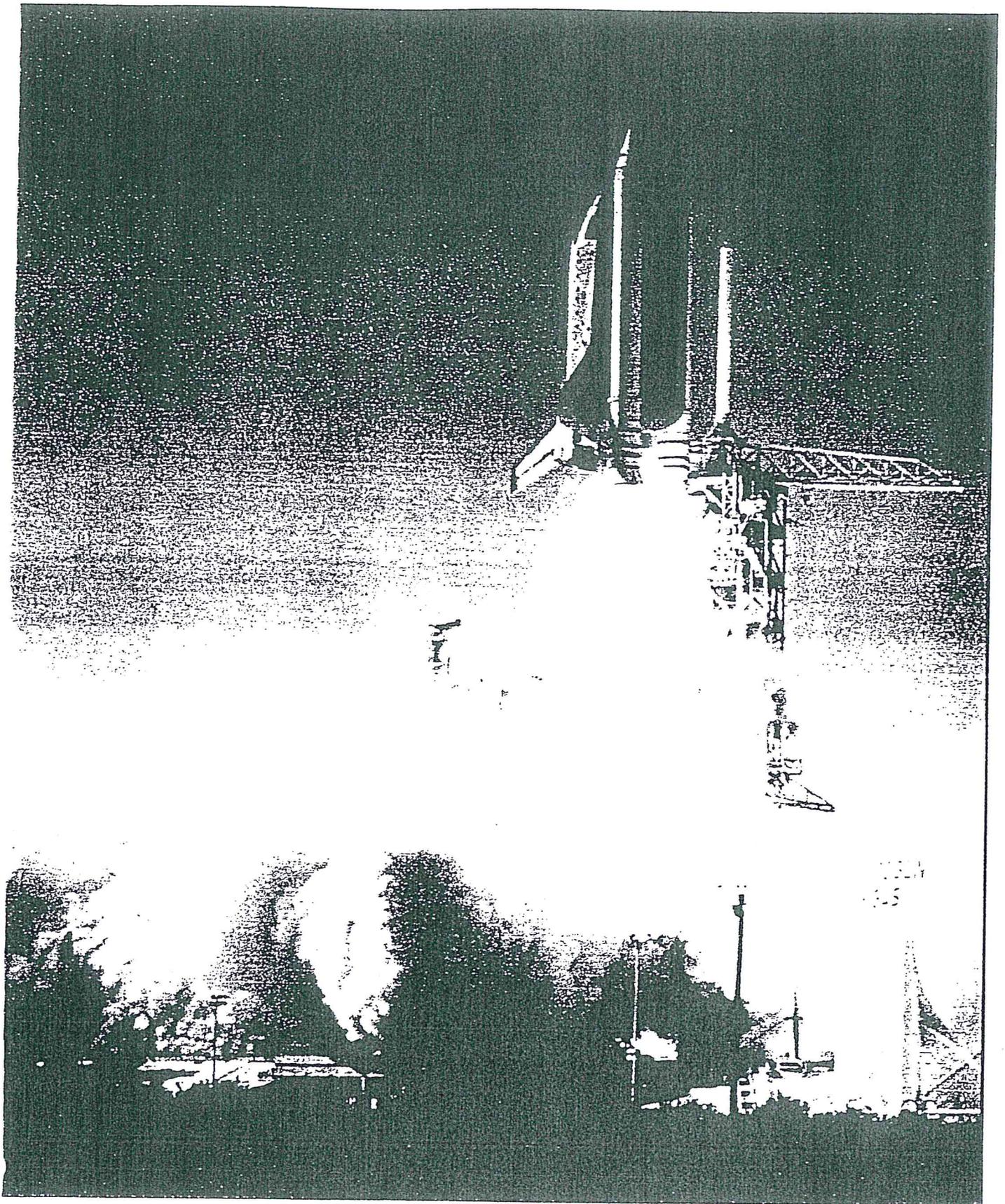

Last Flight of the Challenger

The school children jumped up and down in the field. They were excited and couldn't wait for the big moment to arrive.

"We're at nine minutes and counting," the announcer said.

The children turned their eyes to the Cape Canaveral **launch** pad just four miles away. There sat the space **shuttle Challenger**. In a few minutes, it would **blast off**.



"T minus four minutes and counting."

The children giggled. These third-graders had never been so excited. Their classmate's mother was on board the shuttle. Her name was Christa McAuliffe. She was a teacher in their hometown of Concord, New Hampshire. She was the first teacher ever to go up into space.

"T minus ten . . . nine . . . eight . . . seven . . . six . . ."

Silence fell over the field.

"We have main-engine start."

The children held their breath.

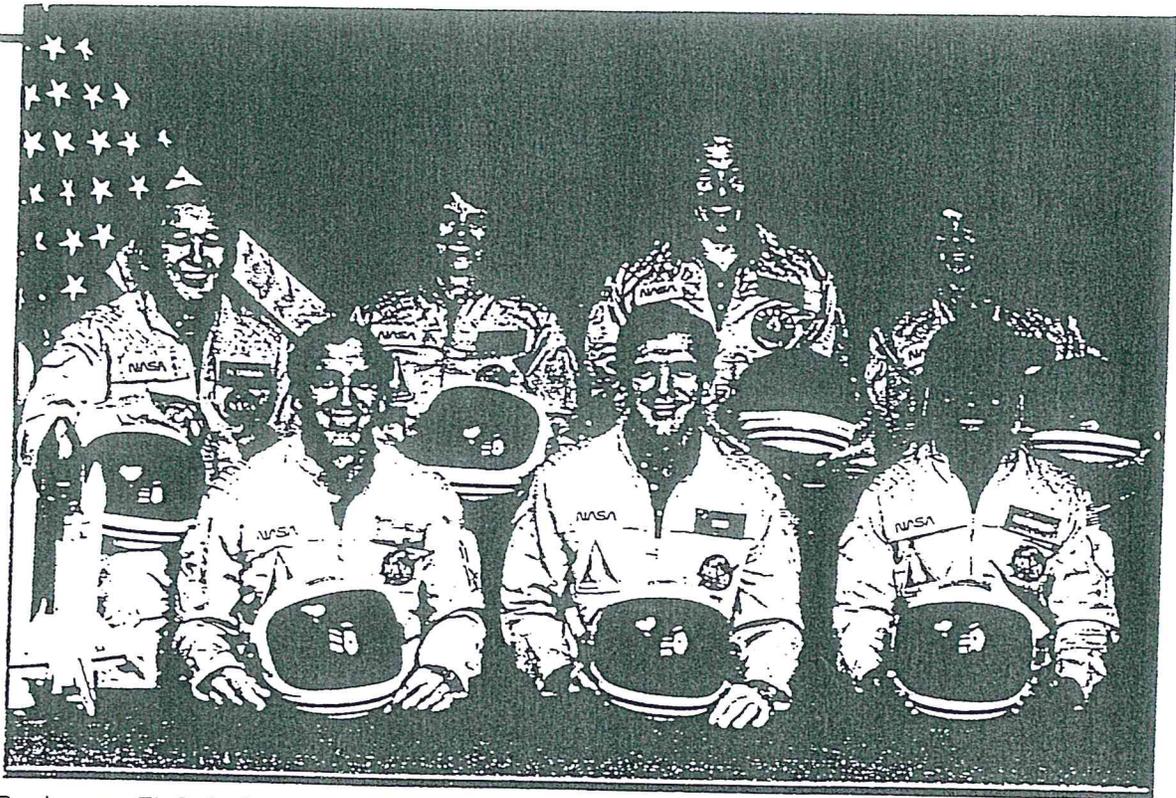
A Delayed Launch

Christa McAuliffe had been waiting for this day for over a year. It started when she entered a contest. More than 11,000 teachers entered. They all wanted to ride the shuttle. But McAuliffe won. McAuliffe was bright, daring, and full of spirit. She was the perfect person to go up in the Challenger. She would show everyone that space travel was safe and fun.

McAuliffe couldn't fly the shuttle, of course. She was a passenger. The shuttle would be flown by six astronauts. Dick Scobee would be the flight commander. Scobee had already made one trip in the shuttle. So had three of the other astronauts.

NASA was in charge of the flight. NASA is the National **Aeronautics** and Space Administration. It runs America's space program. NASA planned the launch for January 25, 1986. But bad weather forced a **delay**. Then there was a problem with the shuttle's door. Again the date was pushed back.

January 28 was a very cold day. The shuttle had never been launched in such cold weather. Some scientists were worried. They thought the cold



Back row: El Onizuka, Christa McAuliffe, Greg Jarvis, Judy Resnik.
Front row: Mike Smith, Dick Scobee, Ron McNair.

weather could cause trouble. They feared it might damage the shuttle's O-rings. These rings sealed the rocket boosters. Other scientists disagreed. They thought the shuttle would be fine. NASA decided to go ahead with the launch.

Disaster Strikes

"Four . . . three . . . two . . . one. And liftoff!" the announcer said. "Liftoff of the twenty-fifth space shuttle mission. And it has cleared the tower."

The children watching from the field broke into wild cheers. They danced with joy. They saw the shuttle move up, up, up into the sky.

On board the Challenger, McAuliffe and the others lay in place. The power of the blast-off pushed them deep into their seats. Commander Scobee talked on the radio with the control tower. At first, everything

seemed normal. After 52 seconds, a controller told Scobee that everything looked fine.

“Challenger, go with **throttle** up,” the controller said.

“Roger, go with throttle up,” Scobee replied.

Scobee’s words were spoken 70 seconds into the flight. Four seconds later, something horrible happened. Red, yellow, and orange flames shot out from the shuttle. The Challenger turned into a ball of fire. Then it exploded into many pieces.

We Will Remember

Back on Earth, no one could believe it. Some of the children in the field began crying. McAuliffe’s family stared in horror. The controllers in the tower didn’t know what to say. All around the world, people sat in shock.

People expressed their **grief** in many ways. Some kept their porch lights burning in memory of the shuttle crew. Others put up signs which read, May They Rest in Peace. President Reagan honored them in a speech. Pope John Paul II said a special prayer. Everywhere people cried and prayed and hugged each other.

Later a commission explored why the shuttle had exploded. Photographs showed dark smoke coming from the right rocket booster seconds after liftoff. It appeared that the O-rings had failed to work.

The Challenger explodes.





Flags at the White House honor the astronauts.

Everyone was upset. NASA did not launch another shuttle for more than two years. It worked to make sure that such a mistake would never happen again.

The Challenger disaster reminded everyone of the risks of space travel. Ronald McNair was one of the astronauts on board the Challenger. Earlier he had said, "You can only become a winner if you are willing to walk over the edge." For their willingness to face the unknown, the crew of the Challenger will always be remembered.

Do You Remember?

■ In the blank, write the letter of the best ending for each sentence.

- _____ 1. Christa McAuliffe was a
a. scientist. b. teacher. c. engineer.
- _____ 2. Christa McAuliffe wanted to show that space travel was
a. hard. b. dangerous. c. fun.
- _____ 3. Dick Scobee was the flight
a. announcer. b. commander. c. controller.
- _____ 4. The shuttle had never been launched in such
a. cold weather. b. wind. c. rain.
- _____ 5. When the shuttle exploded, people were
a. shocked. b. thrilled. c. calm.

Express Yourself

■ Explain what Ronald McNair meant when he said, "You can only become a winner if you are willing to walk over the edge." Write about whether or not you agree.

Exploring Words

- Use the clues to complete the puzzle. Choose from the words in the box.

launch
 shuttle
 astronauts
 commander
 Aeronautics
 delay
 controller
 throttle
 horror
 grief

Across

3. The Challenger was a space _____.
 6. first "A" in "NASA"
 7. to change to a later time
 9. great sadness
 10. lever to control speed

Down

1. Dick Scobee's job
 2. he talked to astronauts by radio
 4. to take off
 5. people who travel in space
 8. great fear

