

# An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth

Chris Hadfield is a Canadian astronaut. He was the first Canadian to walk in space, and once commanded the International Space Station. Chris first went into space in 1995 on the Space Shuttle *Atlantis*. In this extract from his memoir, Chris describes his first take-off.

One morning a strange thought occurs to me shortly after waking: the socks I am about to put on are the ones I'll wear to leave Earth. That prospect feels real yet surreal, the way a particularly vivid dream does. The feeling intensifies at breakfast, when reporters jostle each other to get a good photo, as though I'm a condemned\* man and this is my last meal. Similarly, a little later on, when the technicians help me into my custom-made spacesuit for pressure checks, the joviality\* feels forced. It's the moment of truth. The suit needs to function perfectly — it is what will keep me alive and able to breathe if the spacecraft depressurizes in the vacuum of space — because this isn't a run-through.

10 I am actually leaving the planet today.

[...]

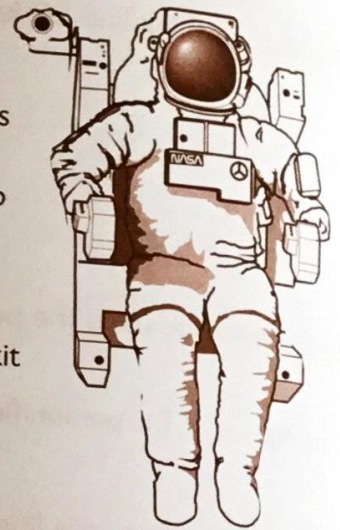
At the launch pad, we ride the elevator up — this one moves at a good clip — and one by one we crawl into the vehicle on our hands and knees. Then the closeout crew helps strap me tightly into my tiny seat, and one of them hands me a note from Helene, telling me she loves me. I'm not exactly comfortable — the spacesuit is bulky and hot, the cabin is cramped, a distinctly un-cushion-like parachute and survival kit is wedged awkwardly behind my back — and I'm going to be stuck in this position for a few hours, minimum. But I can't imagine any place else I'd rather be.

20

[...]

Six seconds to go. The engines start to light, and we sway forward as this huge new force bends the vehicle, which lurches sideways then twangs back to vertical. And at that moment there's an enormous, violent vibration and rattle. It feels as though we're being shaken in a huge dog's jaws, then seized by its giant, unseen master and hurled straight up into the sky, away from Earth. It feels like magic, like winning, like a dream.

25



An abridged extract from *An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth* by Chris Hadfield.

## Glossary

condemned — about to be punished

joviality — cheerfulness



1

What do you think the word "intensifies" (line 3) means? Check your answer in a dictionary.

.....

1 mark

2

Why do you think Chris put the words "I am actually leaving the planet today" in line 10 on a separate line?

.....  
.....

2 marks

3

Are you surprised that Chris says "I can't imagine any place else I'd rather be" in lines 19-20? Explain your answer.

.....  
.....  
.....

2 marks

4

a. Write down the three verbs that Chris uses to describe the movement of the spacecraft in line 22.

.....

1 mark

b. Why do you think Chris chose these verbs?

.....  
.....

2 marks

5

Explain the effect that the last two sentences of this text have on the reader.

.....  
.....  
.....

2 marks

**Total**  
out of 10



# An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth



## Question Book:

Year 5, pages 4-5

## Author / Source:

Chris Hadfield

## Genre:

Non-fiction — memoir

## Cross-curricular links:

- PSHE (ambitions)
- Science (the solar system)
- D&T (building a sundial)

## Introduction

Chris Hadfield grew up on a farm in southern Ontario, Canada. He served as an engineer and fighter pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force but, after watching the Apollo 11 moon landing, aspired to be an astronaut. In 1995, he achieved this goal when he undertook his first space shuttle mission. While commanding the International Space Station in 2013, Chris built up a large audience on social media with his tweets, photographs and videos from space. Before pupils read this extract, show them a video of Space Shuttle *Atlantis* taking off in 1995.

## Answers

1. E.g. gets stronger; grows; increases
2. E.g. Because leaving the planet is a very important event in his life. By putting this sentence on a separate line, he makes it stand out and emphasises how important it is to him.
3. Any appropriate answer. E.g. I am a bit surprised because the spacecraft sounds very uncomfortable. However, being in the spacecraft means that Chris is about to go into space, which is something he wants to do, so it's not that surprising that he's happy to be there.
4. a. bends, lurches, twangs b. E.g. Because they show that the spacecraft was moving violently and awkwardly, so they add to the idea that the journey will be uncomfortable.
5. E.g. They create a vivid picture in the reader's mind of the violence of take-off and how it feels to travel in a spacecraft. They also describe Chris's excitement as the vehicle takes off, which makes the reader feel excited about what will happen next, and about the idea of going into space.

## Extra Activities

- Drawing on pupils' answers to questions 4 and 5 in the Question Book, discuss the description of the take-off in lines 21-25 of the text. Highlight Chris's choice of vocabulary and ask pupils to identify words that help to emphasise the power and drama of the take-off. Challenge pupils to suggest alternative words and phrases that would create a similar effect.
- Show pupils the video of Space Shuttle *Atlantis* taking off again, and then ask them to write a description of the take-off from the perspective of an external observer. Encourage them to think about their choice of vocabulary and to use figurative language. As a class, compare the pupils' descriptions with Chris Hadfield's, and discuss the difference between witnessing an event and experiencing it first-hand.
- Chris Hadfield began working towards his goal of becoming an astronaut at a young age. Ask pupils to think of something they would like to achieve as an adult. They should write a letter to their future selves, describing what they hope to be doing and how they will work towards achieving this ambition.
- Using a torch to represent the Sun and a globe for the Earth, explain how the rotation of the Earth causes night and day, and creates the impression of the Sun moving across the sky from east to west. Pupils could then apply this knowledge by constructing a sundial, using a metre stick for the shaft and making chalk marks on the ground to record the position of its shadow at different times of day.