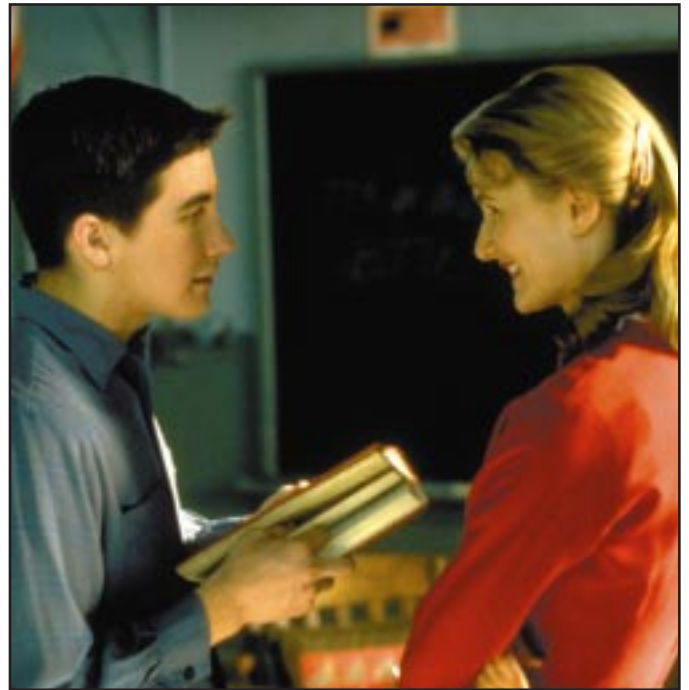


# Developmental Program Guide

## October Sky

*"Sometimes one dream is enough to light up the whole sky."*

Set in the late 1950s, *OCTOBER SKY* is based on the real life story of Homer Hickum and three boyhood friends growing up in the West Virginia coal-mining town of Coalwood. Inspired by Sputnik's launch into outer space and the support of one high school teacher, together the boys pursue their dream of going to college on a science scholarship. Overcoming many obstacles and with the help of the Coalwood community, the four teenagers accomplish the unbelievable. *OCTOBER SKY* deals with issues of personal and family relationships, and personal achievement.



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## Programming Suggestions

This developmental guide is designed to facilitate educational programs after viewing the film *OCTOBER SKY*. Its purpose is to generate discussion based on social issues found within the movie and for program participants to reflect on themes that may be pertinent to them. Therefore, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to questions in this guide.

The discussion facilitator may choose to utilize one of the following activities as a means of developing discussion:

- Invite instructors from Child and Family Studies, Sociology and Psychology to talk with students about the relationships represented in the movie and life in a "company" town.
- Invite a faculty member from the History Department to talk with students about the Sputnik launch and the Space Race.
- Invite a local Hobby Shop to hold a rocket launch or other activity.
- Have students share their dreams and aspirations and how their families reacted or how they think their family will react.

An important consideration in choosing any facilitation option is that all students have an opportunity to participate. Be aware that many of the topics addressed in the film are not often talked about in public settings. Students who attend the program may have varying degrees of comfort level with the discussion.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Identify the main characters in OCTOBER SKY and what you think motivates them.

The "Rocket Boys"

Homer Hickum, Roy Lee Cooke, Sherman Odell, and Quinton Wilson

John, Elsie, and Jim Hickum

Miss Riley and Principle Turner

Ike Bykowsky and Leon Bolden

Dorothy and Valentine

- What are your general impressions of the different characters?
- Discuss the culture of the small town (Coalwood) and that of the mine and the county high school (Big Creek). What influences did these cultures have on the potential success or failure of the Rocket Boys? What cultural influences are impacting/have impacted you as a student?
- As they progressed, the Rocket Boys found varying levels of support and understanding from family and community members and school officials. A mitigating factor impacting this support was the ongoing relationship between the Coalwood Mine's management and union workers. How did their (management and union) ongoing relationship impact the Rocket Boys? In turn, did the Rocket Boys impact the relationship between mine management and union workers? In what ways?
- Have you ever had instructors/mentors who remind you of Miss Riley, Principle Turner, Ike Bykowsky, or John Hickum? Why would one instructor/mentor be very supportive and another be very critical?
- As the leader of the Rocket Boys, Homer Hickum experienced many pivotal moments in his quest of achieving a college scholarship. Discuss the following situations and how Homer addressed these pivotal moments:

Homer's family, particularly his father and mother.

Miss Riley's initial encouragement, followed by disapproval and ultimately affirmation.

The Rocket Boy's being arrested for starting a fire.

John Hickum's accident.

The theft of the Rocket Boy's science fair exhibit.

Homer telling his father about meeting Wernher Von Braun.

- Even though the Rocket Boys were high school students, does your experience parallel what you as college students face as you choose a major and subsequent profession? If so, what can be learned from this true story?
- Many people, including Homer, felt that he was being "called to be something bigger" than a coal miner. Define what it means to be "called" to your life's work. How does a "calling" impact the day-to-day life of a college student? How does a "calling" impact the day-to-day life of a "seasoned" (15 or more years) professional in his/her field of expertise? Do any of you feel "called"?
- What was the most important lesson you learned from watching OCTOBER SKY?
- Would you recommend this movie to a friend? Why or why not?

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