

The Cultural Moon

People from all over the world make meaning out of the shapes they see on the Moon.

The cultural history of the Moon can be found in many different parts of society. The shapes we see on the Moon are outlines of physical features like craters and mountains interacting with reflected sunlight. The way people make meaning of those shapes depends on their cultures, and what the people around them see. Traditionally, Europeans have seen the shape of a figure carrying a bundle of wood over his shoulder; Japanese have seen the shape of a rabbit next to a pot; Peruvians have seen the shape of a fox. Other aspects of the Moon affect cultural and scientific practices as well. For example, the Moon's cycle has influenced most calendars and timekeeping in recorded history. Months in the calendar used in the U.S. reflect the Moon's cycle.

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Every person comes from a community that has stories about the moon. The stories of how NASA succeeded in sending astronauts and spacecraft to the Moon are stories of overcoming failures and making discoveries. The fable about a fox looking in a river and mistaking the Moon's reflection for cheese is possibly about the dire consequences of greed or foolishness. The Snoqualmie tribe's story of the birth of the Moon and its creation of people, rivers, fish, and game describes a physical connection between these important players in the landscape of the Pacific Northwest. We respect people's stories by making sure we have permission to share that story before telling it. What is your ancestors' story of the Moon?



NASA also uses art to connect with the public's interest in the Moon, like in this artist's impression of the LCROSS spacecraft on a mission.



People from different cultures see different shapes in the Moon. For example, they might see a rabbit standing next to a cooking pot.