Jessica Watkins leads new SpaceX station crew

LEVEL B1


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I. WARM-UP

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word space?
2. Would you like to live on a space station? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever waited through a long delay? What happened?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

commander
the leader of a team or mission, especially in the military or space

capsule
the small spacecraft where astronauts sit during launch and landing

leak
a problem where liquid or gas escapes from a hole or crack

delay
a wait that makes something happen later than planned

liftoff
the moment a rocket rises from the ground into the sky

orbit
the curved path a spacecraft follows around Earth or another body

transit
a journey from one place to another over a set time

replace
to take the place of someone or something

III. READING

SpaceX launched a new crew to the International Space Station from Florida's Cape Canaveral space force station on Thursday. The mission had a three-week delay to fix the capsule's fuel leak, and clouds threatened the countdown, but liftoff was safe.

Jessica Watkins, the commander, became the first Black woman to lead a crew to orbit. A trained geologist, she is making her second visit to the station after a long stay in 2022. After reaching orbit, she radioed, "Thanks for an amazing ride."

Her crewmates are Nasa's Luke Delaney, Canada's Joshua Kutryk, and Russia's Sergey Teteryatnikov. The flight to the station is set to be a quick eight-hour transit, and the astronauts will stay about six months, until spring, to replace the current crew. Kutryk's wife is due to give birth in late November, and agencies say they will help him stay in touch.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "SpaceX launches crew to ISS successfully...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where did the rocket launch from?
2. Who became the first Black woman to lead a crew to orbit?
3. How long will the astronauts stay at the space station?
4. Why was the mission delayed before launch?
5. Which astronaut expects a new baby during the mission?

V. DISCUSSION

1. What qualities should a space mission commander have?
2. Is a quick eight-hour transit to the ISS important? Why?
3. How might long missions affect astronauts' families?
4. Should countries always cooperate on space missions? Why or why not?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Present perfect vs past simple

Use past simple for finished past times (e.g., Thursday, in 2022). Use present perfect (have/has + past participle) for life experience or results up to now with ever/never/already/so far/since/for. For example: "Watkins stayed on the ISS in 2022" becomes "Watkins has stayed on the ISS before."

> *"SpaceX **launched** a new crew to the International Space Station."*
>
> *"The mission **had** a three-week delay to fix the capsule's fuel leak."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each gap with past simple or present perfect.

1. The rocket (lift off) ___ on Thursday.
2. The astronauts (be) ___ in orbit since Thursday.
3. Watkins (visit) ___ the station in 2022.
4. Astronauts (keep) ___ in touch during missions so far.
5. Clouds (threaten) ___ the countdown earlier.

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 12–15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or check names and acronyms (Nasa, ISS, SpaceX) and the place (Cape Canaveral). Practise saying the astronauts' names before reading.
- Run the reading once for gist (who, where, how long), then again for detail (reason for delay, eight-hour transit). Pair students for comprehension, then check as a class.
- For discussion, use small groups and rotate spokespersons. If family topics feel personal, invite students to speak generally or about the article instead of themselves.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Brainstorm in pairs, then rank the top three qualities as a group and ask for examples.
2. Take a quick show of hands (yes/no), then pair students to list two pros and two cons.
3. Ask for two possible challenges and two positives; allow answers about the article, not themselves.
4. Note this crew is international (US, Canada, Russia). Split groups to argue for or against cooperation, then switch sides.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: In pairs, write a 70-word update Jessica Watkins could send to the public after docking.

Debate: In two teams, debate: Shorter trips vs longer stays on the ISS—Which benefits science more? 8 minutes.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Present perfect vs past simple

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where did the rocket launch from?
   Cape Canaveral space force station in Florida.
2. Who became the first Black woman to lead a crew to orbit?
   Jessica Watkins.
3. How long will the astronauts stay at the space station?
   About six months, until spring.
4. Why was the mission delayed before launch?
   To fix a fuel leak in the capsule; the delay lasted three weeks.
5. Which astronaut expects a new baby during the mission?
   Canada's Joshua Kutryk.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use past simple for finished past times (e.g., Thursday, in 2022). Use present perfect (have/has + past participle) for life experience or results up to now with ever/never/already/so far/since/for. For example: "Watkins stayed on the ISS in 2022" becomes "Watkins has stayed on the ISS before."

> *"SpaceX* **launched** *a new crew to the International Space Station."*
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VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each gap with past simple or present perfect.

1. The rocket ___ on Thursday. **lifted off**
2. The astronauts ___ in orbit since Thursday. **have been**
3. Watkins ___ the station in 2022. **visited**
4. Astronauts ___ in touch during missions so far. **have kept**
5. Clouds ___ the countdown earlier. **threatened**