SpaceX catches Starship after orbit

LEVEL B1


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I. WARM-UP

1. What do you know about rockets and space travel?
2. What do you think usually happens to a rocket after launch?
3. Would you like to see a rocket launch? Why or why not?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

rocket
a vehicle that travels into space using powerful engines

booster
the lower part of a rocket that gives strong lift at launch

orbit
the path an object takes around a planet

mission
a planned space flight with specific goals

explode
to burst violently and break into pieces

reusable
able to be used again instead of thrown away

tower
a tall structure; here, the launch structure next to the rocket

fuel
the energy source that engines burn to work

III. READING

SpaceX marked a major step toward reusability when Starship's upper stage returned to its Texas launch tower after orbiting Earth. The 171ft upper stage dropped into the tower's mechanical arms, ending a 22-hour mission with 14 orbits.

It was the company's first catch of the upper stage, and only the second time Starship had reached orbit. It was the vehicle's 15th test flight, planned as a double catch with both parts returning to the launch site.

That goal failed when the Super Heavy booster diverted minutes after take-off and exploded in the Gulf of Mexico. SpaceX said the guidance system stopped the attempt because the booster was off course, and Elon Musk added it was slightly low on fuel. Even so, SpaceX called the result a victory.

A reusable rocket could lower costs and support future crewed flights, including Nasa's plan to return people to the Moon in 2028. The craft also deployed 26 Starlink V3 satellites during the mission.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "SpaceX's Starship returns to launch pad...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What happened to the upper stage at the end of the mission?
2. How long did the mission last, and how many orbits were made?
3. What happened to the Super Heavy booster, and where?
4. Why did SpaceX still call the test a victory?
5. How many Starlink V3 satellites were deployed?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Is making rockets reusable a good goal? Why or why not?
2. What risks are acceptable during test flights like this?
3. Should governments fund a Moon return in 2028?
4. Do more satellites help or harm life on Earth?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

So/such/too/enough

Use so with adjectives/adverbs; use such with (a/an) + adjective + noun. Too means more than is possible/safe: too + adj/adv + to + verb. Enough shows the needed amount: adj/adv + enough, or enough + noun.

"It was **such a long mission** *that Starship circled Earth many times."*

"The booster was **too far off course to be caught**."

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. A rocket is (so / such) heavy that it needs powerful engines. _____
2. Rockets are (enough / too) expensive to use only once. _____
3. The tower arms were strong (enough / too) to hold Starship. _____
4. They moved (such / so) fast that work finished quickly. _____
5. Catching the upper stage was (so / such) a big step forward. _____

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, 8–10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or check: booster, orbit, reusable, explode, tower. Use an image of a two-stage rocket to show the parts.
- Run the reading: first skim for the main result, then scan for numbers (171ft, 22 hours, 14 orbits, 26 satellites). Pair students for comprehension before whole-class feedback.
- Lead the discussion in pairs first, then share highlights. Keep the focus on engineering goals and public benefits rather than on views about individuals.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Ask for one benefit and one drawback; then have pairs rank benefits by impact.
2. Elicit examples of acceptable risk, then probe for limits and how to decide them.
3. Take a quick vote, then group pros and cons to compare costs and benefits.
4. List two benefits and two harms on the board; ask for concrete examples for each.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: In pairs, write a 70-word news update summarising the flight's key results for a school website.

Debate: Split into two teams: argue for or against rapid reuse as the best way to cut spaceflight costs; speak for two minutes per side.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: So/such/too/enough

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

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What happened to the upper stage at the end of the mission?
   It was caught by the launch tower's mechanical arms in Texas.
2. How long did the mission last, and how many orbits were made?
   It lasted 22 hours and made 14 orbits.
3. What happened to the Super Heavy booster, and where?
   It diverted and exploded in the Gulf of Mexico.
4. Why did SpaceX still call the test a victory?
   They caught the upper stage, a key step toward reusability.
5. How many Starlink V3 satellites were deployed?
   Twenty-six.

V. DISCUSSION

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

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. A rocket is (so / such) heavy that it needs powerful engines. **so**
2. Rockets are (enough / too) expensive to use only once. **too**
3. The tower arms were strong (enough / too) to hold Starship. **enough**
4. They moved (such / so) fast that work finished quickly. **so**
5. Catching the upper stage was (so / such) a big step forward. **such**

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use so with adjectives/adverbs; use such with (a/an) + adjective + noun. Too means more than is possible/safe: too + adj/adv + to + verb. Enough shows the needed amount: adj/adv + enough, or enough + noun. (Examples constructed.)

> *"It was* **such a long mission** *that Starship circled Earth many times."*
>
> *"The booster was* **too far off course to be caught**."