SpaceX Starship finally reaches orbit

LEVEL C1


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I. WARM-UP

1. What space launch or mission has impressed you recently? Why?
2. What should private companies focus on in space exploration?
3. How do you feel about rockets flying over populated areas?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

milestone
An important stage that shows significant progress has been made.

uncrewed
Without people on board; operated remotely or automatically.

altitude
The height of something above the Earth or sea level.

reusable
Able to be used again instead of thrown away.

salvage
To save something valuable from loss or damage, often after an accident.

modify
To change something in order to improve it or make it fit a new use.

certify
To officially approve something as meeting a required standard.

dock
To join two spacecraft together in space.

III. READING

SpaceX's giant Starship reached Earth orbit for the first time, a long-sought milestone for SpaceX. The uncrewed rocket lifted off from Starbase in Texas and, despite one engine shutting down early, continued as planned. It carried 26 new Starlink satellites to join about 11,000 already in service.

This was Starship's 14th full-scale launch from Texas's far south. Earlier attempts went no farther than the Indian Ocean and ended in flames. This time, SpaceX aimed for six orbits at an altitude of about 275 km over nearly ten hours, ending with a Pacific splashdown near Chile.

The first-stage booster was not recovered; it was due to fall into the Gulf of Mexico within minutes. Designed to be fully reusable, the 124-metre rocket is central to lowering launch costs. SpaceX salvaged a Starship from the Indian Ocean in July and used inspections to modify the new heat shield.

The company is pressing to certify Starship for NASA's Artemis missions, which will need orbital manoeuvres to dock with Orion. A second Starship site is nearing completion at Kennedy Space Center, with a third planned in Louisiana. Musk plans to phase out the Falcon 9 within several years.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **Al Jazeera***: "SpaceX's showpiece Starship rocket reaches...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Starship achieve for the first time on this flight?
2. How many new Starlink satellites did the rocket carry?
3. What problem occurred during ascent, and how did the mission proceed?
4. What path and endpoint were planned for this mission?
5. Where was the first-stage booster expected to fall?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Why does a reusable rocket matter for future missions?
2. Should national agencies rely on private rockets for lunar work?
3. What risks must be managed before flights pass over land?
4. Is retiring Falcon 9 within several years realistic? Why or why not?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Adverbs and adverbial phrases: degree

Adverbs of degree show how strong or weak something is. 'Very' goes with adjectives in their basic form; 'much' or 'far' go with comparatives.

> *"Starship's reuse could make launches* **much cheaper***."*
>
> *"The rocket's size and power are* **very impressive***."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. This launch was (much / very) more successful. _____
2. The planned mission was (much / very) long, at nearly ten hours. _____
3. Earlier attempts were (very / much) less controlled. _____
4. At 124 metres tall, Starship is a (very / far) large rocket. _____
5. This time, the goal was (very / far) bigger: six orbits. _____

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: milestone, uncrewed, altitude, reusable. Check knowledge of Artemis, Orion and docking to avoid confusion.
- Run the reading in two passes: gist (what happened, where, why it matters), then detail (numbers, locations, sequence). Keep discussion on engineering choices and policy, not personalities.
- Differentiation: stronger students summarise the mission timeline from launch to splashdown; others match key facts (number of orbits, altitude, booster splash zone) to headings before speaking.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Ask for concrete benefits (cost, cadence) and push for examples from other fields.
2. Take a quick poll, then pair students from opposite views to compare reasons.
3. Board likely risks first (debris, reliability), then ask for practical mitigations.
4. Elicit time, technology and cost arguments; press for one concrete piece of evidence.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: Write a 100-word press note announcing Starship's orbital flight, including altitude, orbits and splashdown location.

Role-play: In pairs, run a NASA–SpaceX briefing: an Artemis planner questions a SpaceX engineer about docking steps and overland safety.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Adverbs and adverbial phrases: degree

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

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Starship achieve for the first time on this flight?
   It reached Earth orbit for the first time.
2. How many new Starlink satellites did the rocket carry?
   It carried 26 new Starlink satellites.
3. What problem occurred during ascent, and how did the mission proceed?
   One engine shut down early, but the flight continued as planned.
4. What path and endpoint were planned for this mission?
   Six orbits at about 275 km over nearly ten hours, ending near Chile in the Pacific.
5. Where was the first-stage booster expected to fall?
   Into the Gulf of Mexico.

V. DISCUSSION

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

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Adverbs of degree show how strong or weak something is. 'Very' goes with adjectives in their basic form; 'much' or 'far' go with comparatives. (Examples constructed.)

> *"Starship's reuse could make launches* **much cheaper***."*
>
> *"The rocket's size and power are* **very impressive***."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. This launch was (much / very) more successful. **much**
2. The planned mission was (much / very) long, at nearly ten hours. **very**
3. Earlier attempts were (very / much) less controlled. **much**
4. At 124 metres tall, Starship is a (very / far) large rocket. **very**
5. This time, the goal was (very / far) bigger: six orbits. **far**