Lightning Looks Different From Space

A new NASA image shows city lights, fishing boats, and lightning glowing together above the South China Sea.



Nighttime Earth from space with glowing city lights, fishing boat lights, and lightning inside clouds over the ocean.

An astronaut on the International **Space** Station took a nighttime **photo** of **Earth** on October 28. NASA's Earth Observatory shared the image on November 17. It shows the South China Sea near Borneo. Bright city lights, fishing boats, and lightning all appear at once. From space, the lightning looks like glowing bursts inside the tops of **clouds**.

The International Space Station is a science lab that circles Earth. It moves high above the planet, so astronauts can look down on **weather** and cities. Most people see lightning from the ground, below the storm. Astronauts see it from above. In the photo, flashes light up tall storm clouds like lamps under a blanket.

NASA says some storm clouds in the picture had overshooting tops. Those are rounded bumps that rise above the flat top of a thunderstorm. They form when fast-rising air pushes cloud material very high. That rising air is called an **updraft**. NASA says these shapes can be signs of strong thunderstorms.

The same picture also shows human lights. Singapore is visible on one side. Singapore is a city-state, which means one city is also its own country. Nearby, a group of blue lights likely came from fishing boats. Some boats use bright lights at night to attract squid or small fish.

Elementary · Tuesday, November 17, 2026 · © 2026 3andB Inc.

The photo matters because it shows Earth as one connected place. A storm, a city, and boats can all fit in one wide view. Weather does not stop at borders. Light from people can be seen far away. A photo from space can help people notice patterns that are hard to see from the ground.

NASA says about 2,000 thunderstorms are happening on Earth at any moment. Together, they make nearly 60 lightning flashes each second. That is roughly 5 million flashes each day. From a classroom window, one storm can seem huge. From **orbit**, it becomes one tiny part of a busy planet.

Written from reporting by NASA.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. **How might seeing Earth from space change the way people think about weather near their own home?**

2. **Do you think this kind of space photo is more useful for science, for art, or for both? Defend your choice.**

3. **What important questions can this photo not answer by itself?**

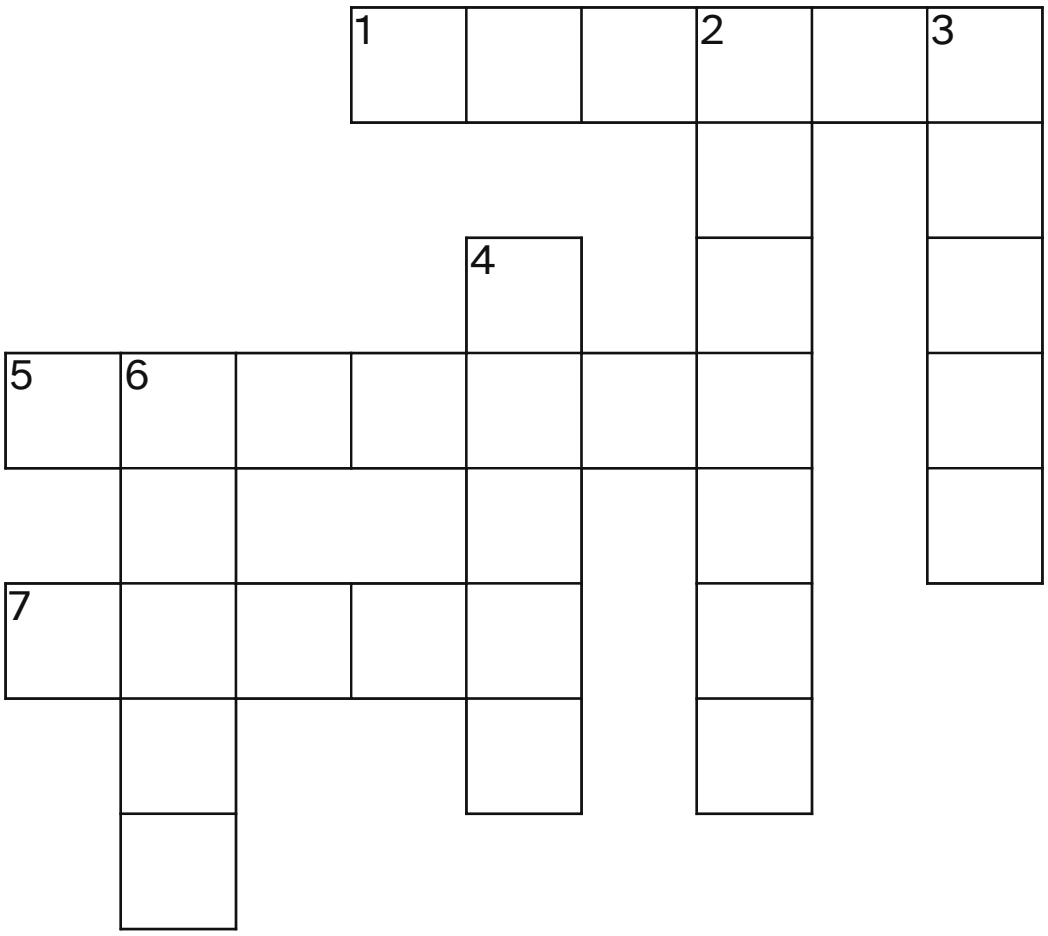
Lightning Looks Different From Space

E S D L C H T R H P
U T T Z L T E O O E
E H U S O R B I T R
E P G P U A H K P A
L C F A D E T O H A
U D P C S R E A P A
O E R E R U A A H P
W E A T H E R F O E
A A T T N O T H T T
X O D D H E H R O H

CLOUDS EARTH ORBIT PHOTO SPACE UPDRAFT
WEATHER

Elementary · Tuesday, November 17, 2026 · © 2026 3andB Inc.

Lightning Looks Different From Space



ACROSS

1 Groups of tiny water drops or ice in the sky

5 Outdoor conditions such as rain, wind, and temperature

7 Curved route around a world

DOWN

2 Fast-rising stream of air

3 Huge area beyond the air around our world

4 Picture made with a camera

6 Planet people call home

Elementary · Tuesday, November 17, 2026 · © 2026 3andB Inc.

Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

NASA

"Tossing Fireworks from Cloud to Cloud"

Published	Tuesday, November 17, 2026
Read by us on	Tuesday, November 17, 2026

https://science.nasa.gov/earth/earth-observatory/tossing-fireworks-from-cloud-to-cloud/

WHAT IS IN THIS PACKET

The article and its discussion questions, a word search, and a crossword.

COPYING AND REUSE

Free to print, copy and hand out for classroom use. Please keep this page with the packet, so the next teacher can see where the story came from.

More where this came from

If this short lesson worked for your class, our full workbooks go further with the same care:

- Complete units with student and teacher editions
- Worked solutions for every exercise
- Standards-aligned, classroom-tested, print-ready

See the full lessons at 3andB.com

© 2026 3andB Inc.