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.

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?**

   > **A strong answer:** A strong answer should compare a local view with a wider view and explain how scale can change understanding.

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

   > **A strong answer:** A strong answer should weigh evidence from the image, such as storm shapes, city lights, and the emotional power of the scene.

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

   > **A strong answer:** A strong answer should notice limits of a single image, such as not showing causes, changes over time, or what people on the ground experienced.

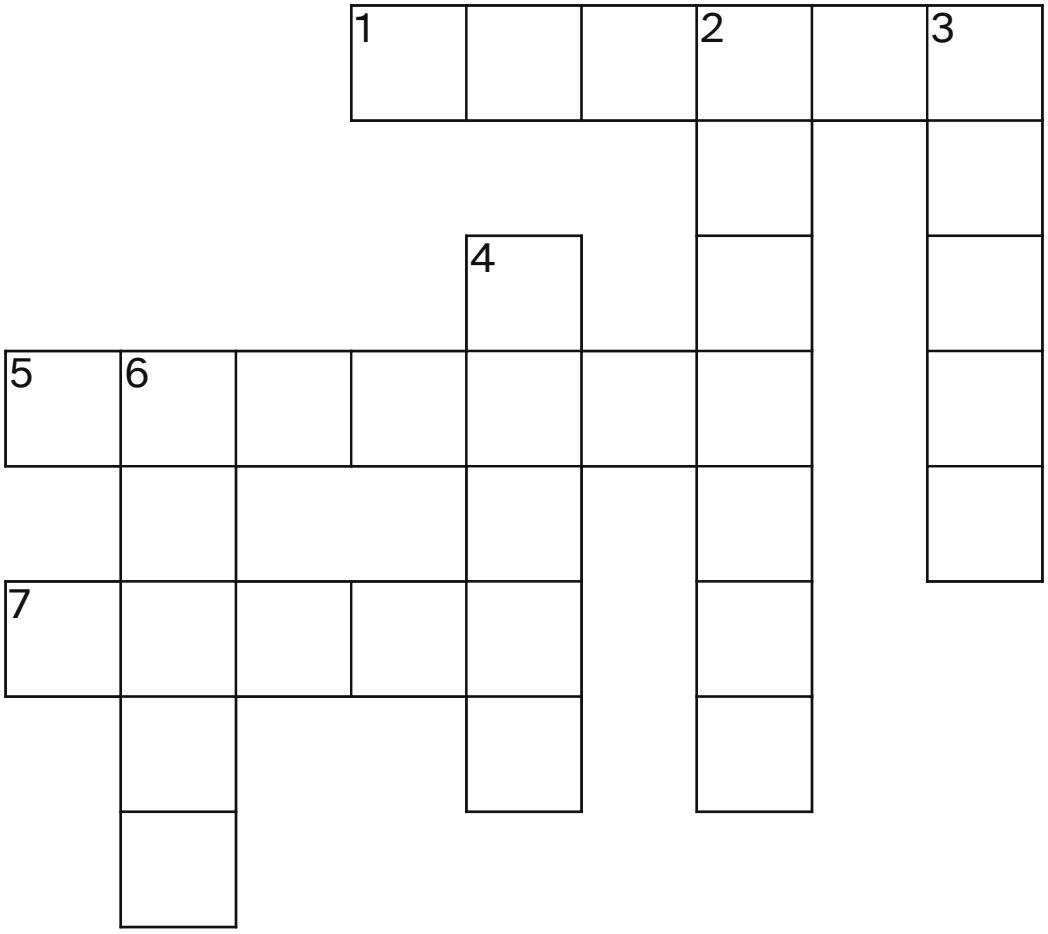
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CLOUDS EARTH ORBIT PHOTO SPACE UPDRAFT
WEATHER

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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

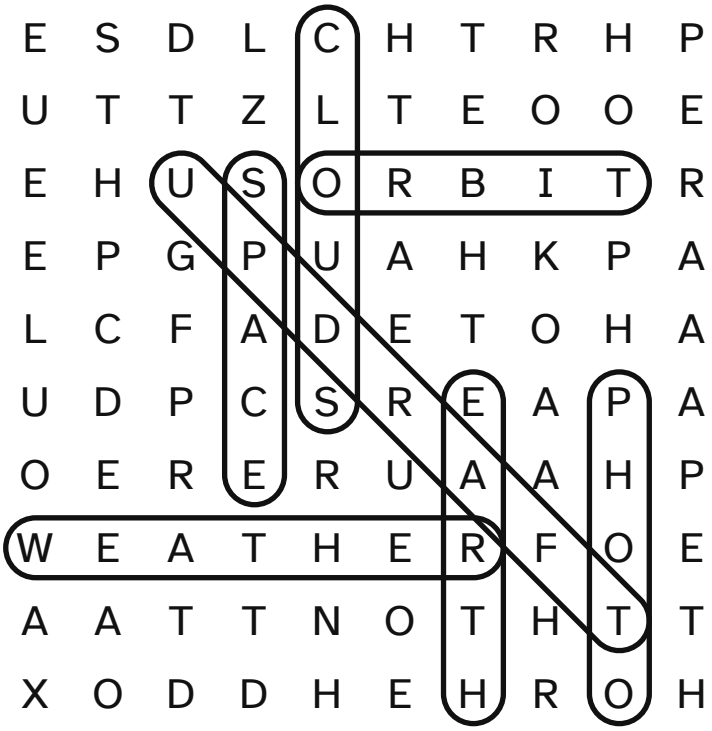
3 Huge area beyond the air around our world

4 Picture made with a camera

6 Planet people call home

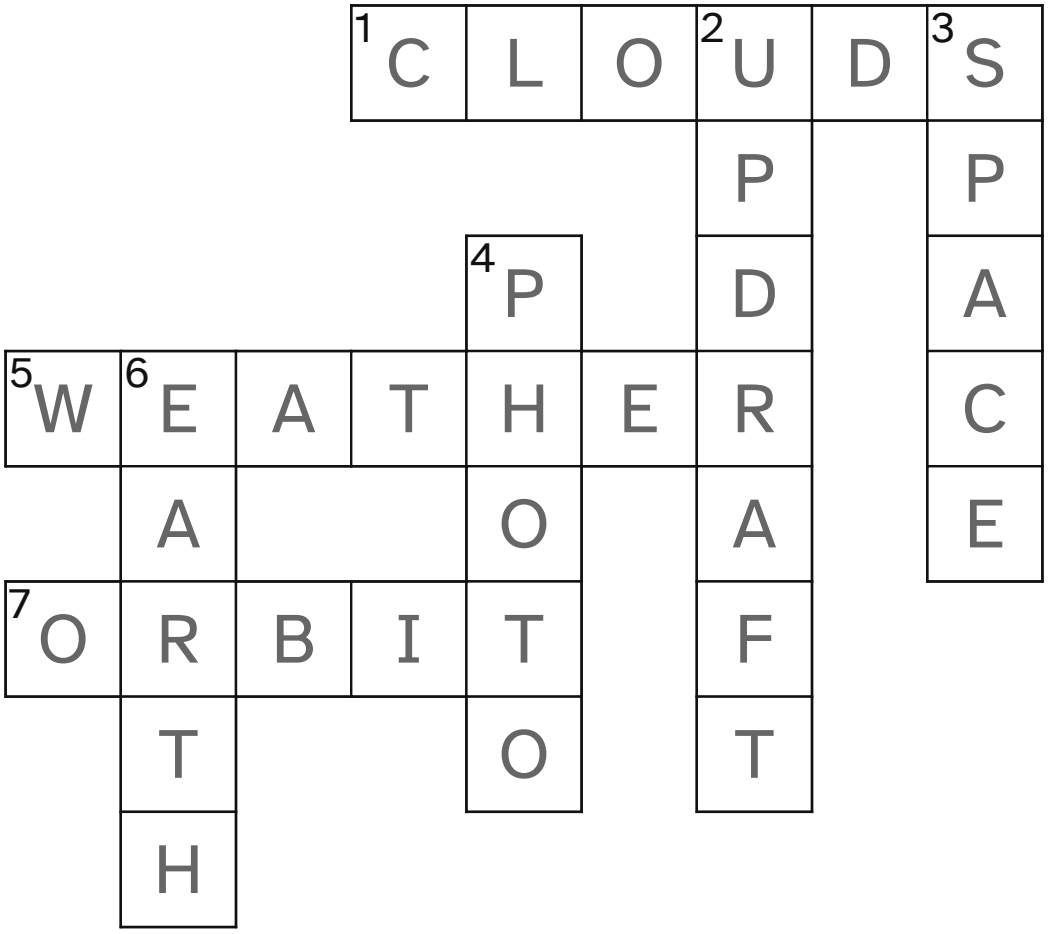
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Lightning Looks Different From Space — answer key



CLOUDS EARTH ORBIT PHOTO SPACE UPDRAFT WEATHER

Lightning Looks Different From Space — answer key



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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 with a note on each question, a word search, a crossword, and the answer key to both.

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