

Reading Level 3: The 'supermoon'

May 6th 2012



Topics: science, nature

Learning points:

- vocabulary
- connectives

1 Have you gazed into the night sky recently? Have you been woken up by beams¹ of moonlight streaming into
2 your bedroom? If so, did the moon look any different to normal? It should have, because recently the full
3 moon has been bigger than normal – it is being called a 'supermoon'. It is 10% larger and 3% brighter than an
4 average full moon. Have you heard about this? Do you know why?

5
6 The explanation is the moon's elliptical orbit has brought it closer to Earth than usual. It is – or at least it was
7 on Saturday night – at the closest point in its orbit to Earth, which is about 50,000km nearer than when it is
8 furthest away (and therefore 15% larger and 30% brighter than when it is at its most distant). The eye can't
9 perceive² the difference in brightness very easily, but you can see that it is larger than normal.

10
11 Supermoons occur about once a year. Yesterday the moon was brighter than it is going to be for the rest of
12 2012, but another supermoon is going to take place in 2013. On March 19th 2011 there was a supermoon that
13 was actually 400km closer to Earth than this one.

14
15 Some people say that they are affected by the full moon, and there are numerous references to the full moon
16 in folklore³ and superstitions⁴, but despite that there is no scientific evidence for any impact of the full moon
17 on incidence⁵ rates of illness or bad behaviour. Nevertheless⁶, I woke up several times early in the morning
18 on Sunday! Have you been sleeping well recently? Incidentally⁷, did you know that the word 'lunacy'⁸ (which
19 means 'madness') comes from the Latin word for the moon?

20
21 One effect⁹ that the full moon does have is on the tides, because the sun and moon are aligned¹⁰. When
22 there is a supermoon, the high tide is higher than normal, due to the stronger gravitational pull of the moon,
23 but only by about 2-3cm.

24
25 If you haven't seen the supermoon yet, don't worry. Lots of photographs of it have been posted on the
26 internet, and for the next few nights it is going to be almost as big as it was yesterday. Perhaps you will see it
27 tomorrow night, if the sky is clear. The moon looks biggest when it is hanging low in the sky, near the
28 horizon, although this is actually¹¹ only an optical illusion – for which no good explanation has yet been found.
29 So perhaps science hasn't found all the answers to the moon's mysteries yet!

Vocabulary

1. Look at the difference between the word 'affect' (line 15) and 'effect' (line 21).
2. Here is the list of the connectives used in this text. Do you know/use them all?

If so; because; which, therefore, but, despite, nevertheless, incidentally, due to, if, although, so.

¹ beam = (Licht)strahl

² perceive = etw wahrnehmen

³ folklore = Folklore

⁴ superstition = Aberglaube(n)

⁵ incidence = Auftreten, Vorkommen

⁶ nevertheless = trotzdem

⁷ incidentally = übrigens

⁸ lunacy = Wahnsinn

⁹ effect = Auswirkung

¹⁰ to align = etw ausrichten (hinter einander)

¹¹ actually = eigentlich