What's in the sky tonight? A kid-sized answer from your ZIP

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How Peabody's free Sky Tonight works, what the card tells a child, why its times say "about", and what it keeps on your phone (only the ZIP).

To find what's in the sky tonight with a child, type your ZIP into Sky Tonight, let them pick the Moon, a planet or shooting stars, and read the one card aloud: which way to face, how many fists up, and when it's dark enough. It's free through the end of 2026, with no app and no account, and the ZIP never leaves your phone. Peabody (peabody.kids) built it because every "tonight" page we found was either for adults or not about tonight.

What the card says

Each card answers one thing in a sentence a seven-year-old can read. For the Moon: its shape and how much is lit, and where it is at the time you'd go out, or when it rises if it isn't up yet. For a planet: the brightest one up after dark, its direction in compass words (south-east, west) and its height in fists. One fist at arm's length is about ten degrees of sky. For shooting stars: the next meteor shower, how many nights away, and a verdict, great, good, so-so or quiet, from the shower's rate and the Moon on its peak night.

Every card also says when it's dark enough, and "if the sky is clear". It never promises.

Why the times say "about"

Nothing is worked out on your phone. Before launch, Peabody ran astronomy-engine, a free astronomy library, for every night from November 2026 to December 2027 and for every 5° square of the United States in its own time zone, daylight saving included. Your phone reads the first three digits of the ZIP, picks the square, and shows that night's row. A square is about 300 miles across, so a time can be ten minutes off for your street. That is close enough to go outside.

What "dark enough" means

The card's dark-enough time is when the Sun is 6 degrees below the horizon, about half an hour after sunset. The Moon, the bright planets and the brightest stars show by then; faint stars and the Milky Way need longer and a darker place. The time it suggests for going out is half an hour after that, rounded up to the next half hour, but never before 7 pm or after 10 pm. In November and December that is 7 pm almost everywhere.

How to read it outside

1. Face the way it says. If you're not sure which way is south from your back step, remember that the Sun set in the west.
2. Stack fists from the ground. Arm straight out, one fist on the horizon, the next on top of it, as many as the card says.
3. Look for the brightest point that doesn't twinkle much. That's usually the planet.
4. Say what you see out loud. That's the whole job.

Nights worth marking

- 16–17 November: the Leonids, so-so this year, best before dawn.
- 24 November: full Moon, up all night.
- 13–14 December: the Geminids, great this year, with the Moon out of the way.
- 21 December: the winter solstice, the longest night.
- 23 December: the closest full Moon of 2026.

Each has its own page under sky events, with a countdown.

What it keeps

The ZIP, on the phone, so it's there next time. The phone then asks peabody.kids for the file for that whole square; the ZIP itself is never sent. There is a red Outside mode, so the screen doesn't spoil anyone's night eyes, and a Print button for a one-page sheet with a Moon to colour.

Three questions grown-ups ask

What if nothing good is up? Some nights only the Moon is. Seven Nights of Sky plans one thing a night for a week, so there is always tomorrow.

Does it do satellites or the space station? No. For the space station, NASA's Spot the Station does that.

Is it right for Alaska and Hawaii? Yes: they have their own squares and zones. A ZIP the table doesn't hold shows four time-zone boxes instead.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up, and nothing your child taps on the space pages is sent anywhere. When the card's done and everyone's back in, the library has stories at your child's reading level.

Sources

- astronomy-engine (MIT license), every time and position; dark enough is the Sun 6° below the horizon.
- US Census Bureau ZCTA Gazetteer, the ZIP centroids.

- American Meteor Society, meteor shower peak nights and rates.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/whats-in-the-sky-tonight-for-kids