THE WEEK Junior EDUCATION

October 9, 2026
Issue 338



Page	Title	Summary and Discussion Points	Content Area
2	Chinese president visits US	On September 23, Xi Jinping, China's president, and his wife, Peng Liyuan, arrived in the US for a formal state visit. Why was this visit significant? What happens during a formal state visit?	Social Studies
3	New milestone for SpaceX	The private company SpaceX launched its Starship "megarocket" into Earth's orbit at 8:49 a.m. ET on September 28. It was Starship's 14th flight and first attempt to reach orbit beyond Earth's atmosphere. Why is space exploration important? Would you go into space with a private company?	Science/Tech
4	Underground Railroad program adds listings	On September 23, the National Park Service (NPS) announced that it had added 10 new listings to the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. What is the Underground Railroad? Why are we finding sites so many years after the Railroad was used?	Social Studies
9	A poet for the nation	Daniel Umemezie of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was recently named as the 2026–27 National Youth Poet Laureate. What is a poet laureate? What is your favorite type of poetry?	ELA
15	Reducing the climate effects of air travel	The white cloud-like streaks created by airplanes in the sky are called contrails, and they can harm the environment. A new study in the UK hopes to help airlines reduce the number of contrails they create by making minor adjustments to a plane's path or altitude. How does air travel impact the environment? What are some ways frequent travelers can reduce their environmental footprints?	Science

FEATURE OF THE WEEK JUNIOR: That's unbelievable! (page 27)

Invite students to look at this week's feature and answer the questions.	1. This feature is called "That's Unbelievable!" Why do you think it has that name? What do all of the articles have in common? 2. Which of the articles do you find most unbelievable, and why? 3. What are some unbelievable things happening in your school or community? 4. Create your own "That's Unbelievable!" feature for your school or community. Write a three- to five-sentence article about something you find unbelievable, and add a photograph of it.

	DEBATE	ACT
ARTICLE	“Is Monopoly the best board game?” (page 8)	“A poet for the nation” (page 9)
VOCABULARY	overrated, generations, expectations, scheme	poet laureate, passion, artsy, amplify
ACTIVITY	Ask students to write their favorite board game on a sticky note and post it. Read the claim that "Monopoly is the best board game," and have students move to one of four corners (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). Assign students to Team Monopoly, which defends the claim, or Team Challenger, which picks a rival game. Pull 3–5 students aside as judges, and assign each team member a role: opening speaker, researcher, rebuttal speaker, closer, or note-taker. Give teams 30 minutes to agree on what "best" means, create claim-evidence-reasoning arguments, and predict what the other side will say. Run a timed debate with openings, rebuttals, judges' questions, an open floor, and closings. Have judges score each team out of 20 on claim, evidence, reasoning, rebuttal, and respect. Finally, repeat the four-corners poll, compare the results to day one, and have students complete an exit ticket on whether their views changed and which argument convinced them most.	Introduce the term "poet laureate," explaining that it refers to a poet appointed by a government or institution to represent the literary arts and write poems for special events. Explain that a poem is a form of writing that aims to evoke emotion, often through rhyme, rhythm, and figurative language. Introduce terms like rhyme, meter, form, and stanza. Set up five stations with rules and examples for each of these poetry types: haiku, sonnet, cinquain, ballad, and free verse. Have groups rotate through in 5-minute increments, reading the rules and examples and practicing each type. Challenge students to choose an issue they care about, such as bullying, climate change, or discrimination. Encourage them to write what they know about the problem, who it affects, and what change they would like to see. Then have them choose the poetry form that best fits their message and write a poem in that form, using their voices for positive change. Invite pairs to give feedback on what they liked and what they'd like to learn more about. Encourage revision based on that feedback.
EXTEND	Learn the history of Monopoly.	Hold a poetry reading or create a gallery wall entitled, “What We’d Change.”

	CONNECT	CREATE
ARTICLE	“Underground Railroad program adds listings” (page 4)	“Underground Railroad program adds listings” (page 4)
VOCABULARY	freedom seekers, historians, commemorates, exhibit	activists, autobiography, preserve, claim
ACTIVITY	Give students one minute to write what they know about the Underground Railroad. Invite volunteers to share answers. Lead students in a jigsaw activity where they research, build knowledge, and teach each other about the Underground Railroad. Assign each group one of these question sets: 1) What was the Underground Railroad? How did it stay secret? What did conductors, stations, and passengers mean? 2) Who escaped, and who helped them? What role did free Black communities, churches, and abolitionists play? 3) What risks did freedom seekers face? How did the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 make escape harder? 4) What routes did freedom seekers take? 5) Why is it hard for historians to find and prove Underground Railroad sites today? Give groups time to research their answers. Form new groups made up of one person from each original group, and have each person teach the group what they researched. Once everyone has shared, ask how what they learned about secrecy and danger explains why some sites are only being recognized now.	Begin by having students locate each new Underground Railroad site from the article on a US map, labeling it with one sentence about what happened there and noting patterns in where the sites are, such as rivers, borders, or coastlines. Next, assign small groups one site each to research and turn into a profile card covering its location, the people connected to it, the role it played, and why it matters today. Direct groups to share their cards in a gallery walk while classmates leave question sticky notes. Use those questions to launch a class discussion on why a place's story might stay hidden for more than 150 years, who decides which places are officially remembered, and what evidence historians need to prove a site was part of the Underground Railroad. Finally, have groups apply what they learned close to home by investigating possible Underground Railroad connections in their own state or county through the local library, historical society, or the National Park Service's Network to Freedom program, and present their findings as a slideshow, poster, or proposed historical marker with a 50-word inscription.
EXTEND	Tour a stop on the Underground Railroad.	Separate fact from fiction about the Underground Railroad.

* Note: On your computer or mobile device, click or tap blue links to access linked content.