

Vocabulary

Exploring the Solar System



Atmosphere

A layer of gasses surrounding the Earth or another planet. It is also called air.

Asteroid

A small rocky body orbiting the Sun. They can range in size from 300 miles across to the size of a dust particle.

Astronomy

The study of outer space and everything in it, including planets, stars, galaxies, comets, and black holes. Scientists, known as astronomers, have studied space for thousands of years.

Circumpolar

Describes a star or constellation that never sets below the horizon and can be seen all year. They appear to "circle" around the star Polaris, also called the North Star.

Constellation

A group of stars that form a pattern. They may form the shape of mythical figures or objects.

Dwarf Planet

A sphere-shaped object that orbits the Sun like a planet but has not cleared the neighborhood around its orbit.

Galileo Galilei

A famous Italian astronomer who was the first person to use a telescope to make important observations of objects in space.

Gas Giant

A large planet made mostly of gas. Our Solar System has four gas giant planets: Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, and Uranus.

Habitable Zone

The area around a star that is not too hot and not too cold for liquid water to exist on a planet.

Orbit

The path an object takes in space when it goes around another object like a star, planet, or moon.

Phase

One of the stages of the Moon, depending on how much of it is lit by the sun. There are four main Moon phases: new moon, first quarter, the full moon, and last quarter.

**Planet**

A large, natural object that travels around a star. There are eight planets in the Solar System: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. Scientists have discovered that other stars also have planets, but we call them “exoplanets.”

**Planetarium**

A theater with a dome-shaped ceiling designed to show the night sky.

**Prism**

A piece of glass shaped like a pyramid. When white light passes through a prism, it is split into all the colors of the rainbow.

**Revolve**

To move in an orbit. One complete orbit is called a revolution.
Example: The Earth revolves around the Sun.

Rotate

To turn in a circle around an axis. One complete circle is called a rotation.
Example: The Earth completes one rotation every day.

**ROYGBIV**

An imaginary word to help remember all the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

**Solar System**

Includes the Sun and everything that travels around it. The planets, moons, asteroid belt, and dwarf planets are all part of the Solar System.

**Sphere**

An object shaped like a ball. Example: All of the planets are spheres.

Telescope

A tool that uses lenses or mirrors to allow people to see distant objects.

**Terrestrial Planet**

A planet made up mostly of rocks and metals with a solid surface. The Solar System has four terrestrial planets: Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars.

**Water cycle**

The path that water follows as it moves between Earth’s oceans, atmosphere, and land. The steps are evaporation, condensation, and precipitation.

