

Glossary

“The Solar System”: Our place in space



A

Asteroid- a lump of rock or metal orbiting the Sun. Thousand of them are concentrated in a huge ring between Mars and Jupiter, called the Asteroid Belt.

Atmosphere- the layer of gases surrounding some planets and stars.

B

Big Bang Theory- a theory that the Universe began with a huge explosion.

C

Comet- a lump of dirty ice mixed with dust and grit which travels around the Sun in an enormous oval-shaped orbit.

Constellation- a group of stars that form a recognizable pattern. There are 88 constellation.

Convection zone- the region of the interior of the Sun which lies just below the surface. Hot material is brought up to the surface and the cooler material flows down towards the centre in a constant cycle.

Core: the centre of the sun

Corona- the thin and hot upper atmosphere of the Sun visible only with special filter

Cosmos- everything in space. Another name for Universe.

Cromosphere- the lower layer of the atmosphere of the Sun

E

Earth- it is the only planet in the Universe that we know has life. Seen from the space it is called the "blue planet".

G

Galaxy- a huge group of stars. There are millions of galaxies in the Universe.

Gas giant- a planet made up mostly of gas and liquid. Four of the planets in our Solar System- Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune- are gas giants.

Gravity- the force of attraction between two objects. The bigger and heavier an object is, the greater its force of attraction.

J

Jupiter-It is the largest planet in our Solar System. It's so large that if it was hollow all the other planets would fit inside it. It has at least 61 moons. The four largest were discovered 400 years ago by an astronomer Galileo. They are called the Galilean Moons.

M

Mars- It is the fourth planet from the Sun. In some ways it's like our Earth. Mars has volcanoes, valleys and sandy desert.

Mercury- It is the closest planet to the Sun. It is a barren rocky planet and its surface is covered with huge holes or craters where rocks called meteorites have crashed into it.

Meteor- a meteoroid that enters Earth's atmosphere. As it passes through the atmosphere, it burns up, making a streak of light. Also Known as a shooting star.

Meteorite- a meteor that hits the Earth's surface.

Meteoroid- a small piece of rock or dust that orbits the Sun.

Milky Way galaxy- the galaxy that contains our Solar System.

Moon- a natural satellite that orbits a planet.

N

Neptune- It is the furthest planet from the Sun. It is similar in size and make-up to Uranus and is often called its twins.

O

Orbit- the path of an object as it travels around another. For example, the planets orbit the Sun.

P

Photosphere- the luminous visible surface of the sun, being a shallow layer of strongly ionized gases.

Planet- a large object that orbits a star. There are 8 planets in our Solar System.

Pluto- It is a dwarf planet, a ball made of ice and rock. It is a very strange orbit.

R

Radiation zone- it is the inner region of the solar where energy is primarily transported toward the exterior by means of radiative diffusion and thermal conduction, rather than by convection.

S

Saturn- It is the second biggest planet (after Jupiter) in the Solar System. This planet is made of gas, so it's impossible to land on its surface. It has amazing sparkling rings made of millions of pieces of ice. But apart the beauty of its rings, it is a bleak place. It suffers giant thunderstorms and winds that reach speeds of 1800 km an hour.

Solar System- a star and everything in orbit around it. Our Solar System includes the Sun and all the objects that orbit it including the Earth and the Moon.

Star- a huge ball of burning and exploding gas that burns for millions of years, giving off light and heat.

Sun-a medium sized star that lies in the middle of our Solar System.

U

Universe- everything that exists in space, including galaxies, stars and planets.

Uranus- It is a difficult planet to get to know. It is a long way from the Sun and takes 84 years to orbit it. It is the coldest of the planets. It has few features and it is made up of layers and gases and liquid with a centre of icy rock. It is surrounded by moons, whose varied landscapes contrast with the bleak emptiness of the planet itself.

V

Venus- is about the same size as Earth and it is known as Earth's "sister planet". It has volcanoes, mountains and valleys.