

Name: _____ Class: _____

Learning about the Solar System

By Barbara Radner
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Earth is a part of a solar system that includes seven other planets and their moons, all of which orbit around the sun. In this informational text, Barbara Radner provides additional information about what scientists have learned about our solar system. As you read, take notes on the different planets and stars that the author discusses.

- [1] When scientists looked at the stars long ago, they saw patterns. They did not understand everything about what they saw. So they kept looking to learn more. That is what scientists do. They ask questions and look for information to answer their questions. They are like explorers. They do not travel far the way explorers do. But they do make a kind of journey. They want to learn more. They go from what they know to what they discover.



"New Mysteries Surround New Horizons' Next Flyby Target" by NASA is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

Scientists have learned about our planet. It is very big. It is very diverse.¹ There are places that are hot. There are places that are freezing. There are mountains and plains.² There are hills and valleys. There are deep oceans. There are great rivers and waterfalls. There are rainforests. There are deserts. Those are all parts of our planet. There is much more to learn about what is here on Earth. A scientist dedicates³ much time to learning. The scientist works hard. The scientist helps us all find out more about our world.

Our planet is in a galaxy⁴ called the Milky Way. The sun is a big star in our part of this giant galaxy. Our galaxy holds millions of other stars. The sun is very important to our planet. The sun gives us light during the day. It gives us heat, too. Two other planets are closer to the sun than Earth: Mercury and Venus.

Scientists figured out how the Earth changes. Earth orbits the sun once each year. It travels once around the sun every 365 days. The other seven planets in our solar system also orbit around the sun. All travel in a pattern called an ellipse, which is a kind of oval. So at times Earth is farther from the sun. Scientists figured out that made it cooler on Earth then. But they also figured out that it is the tilt of the Earth's axis,⁵ however, that has the greatest effect on temperatures.

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1. **Diverse (adjective):** very different
 2. a large area of flat land with few trees
 3. **Dedicate (verb):** to set aside time to do something
 4. a system of millions or billions of stars held together by gravity
 5. the invisible line that goes through the north and south poles, on which Earth spins