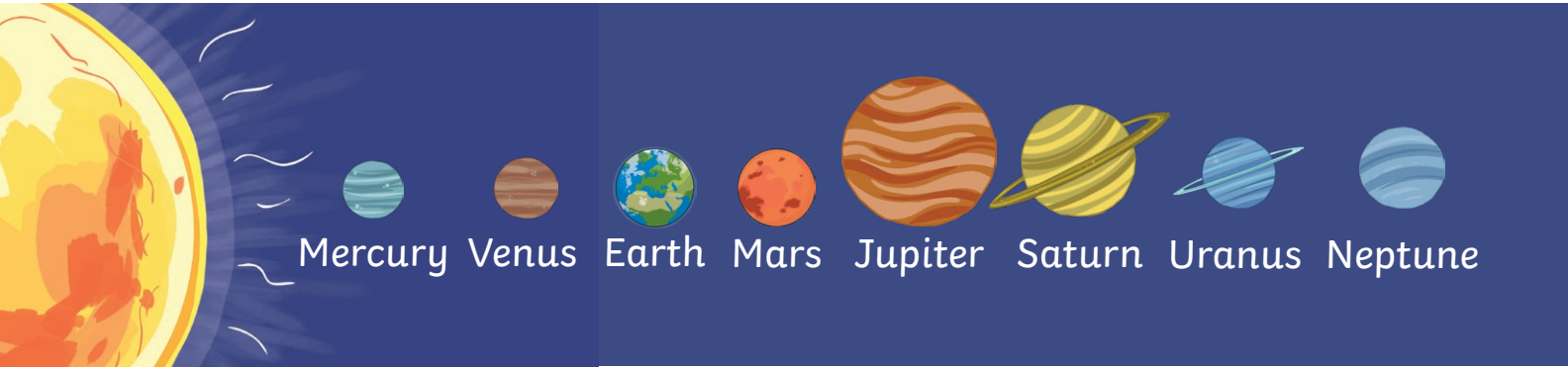


The Solar System

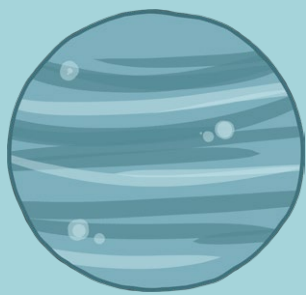
Our planet, Earth, is one of 8 planets in the solar system. Everything in our solar system revolves (goes around) the Sun. The Sun is at the centre of our solar system. The solar system is about 4.6 billion years old.

The planets are in this order from the Sun:



Earth

Earth is the third planet in the solar system. It is also the fifth largest planet. Earth is the only planet in the solar system that is known to have living things on it. It was formed almost 5 billion years ago from clouds of swirling dust and gas. The Earth spins on its axis (a bit like a spinning top) but it also rotates (travels around) the Sun. It takes a year to go around the Sun once.

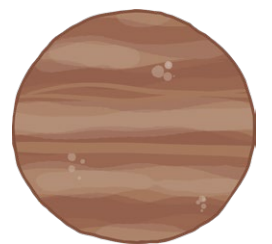


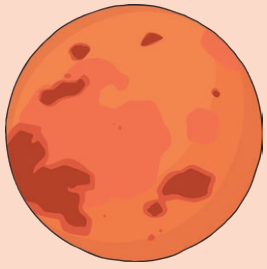
Mercury

Mercury is the planet nearest to the Sun. It has very little air, so although it is close to the Sun, it gets very cold when it is dark as all the heat escapes into space!

Venus

Venus is the second planet from the Sun and it is Earth's closest neighbour. Venus can be seen from Earth at night. It is the second brightest thing in the sky at night - the Moon is the brightest. The atmosphere on Venus is poisonous. Venus has lots of volcanoes.



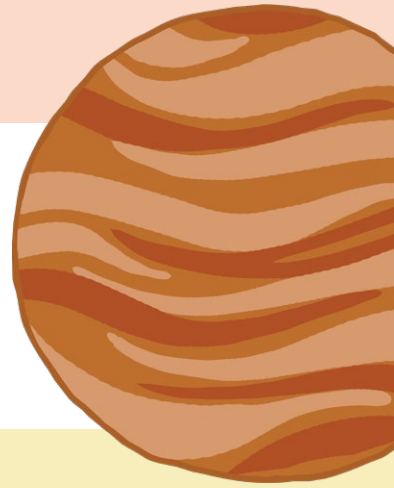


Mars

Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun. It is called the Red Planet because the rocks on the surface have a lot of rust in them (iron oxide). This makes the rocks look red and this makes the planet look red.

Jupiter

Jupiter is the fifth planet from the Sun and it is the largest planet in the solar system. It is made of gas (it is called a gas giant) and it spins quickly. A day on Jupiter is only 10 hours long!



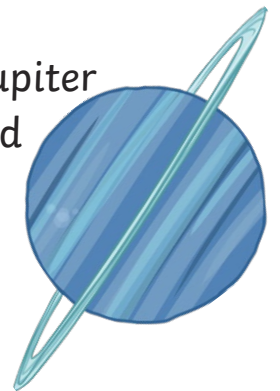
Saturn

Saturn is the sixth planet. It is also made of gas. Saturn has 7 rings around it. They are made up of rocks and ice. Saturn is about nine times bigger than Earth. It also has 53 moons (that scientists have confirmed - they think there might be at least 8 more!).



Uranus

Uranus is the seventh planet in the solar system. Like both Jupiter and Saturn, it is made up of gas. Uranus is very windy and cold. Because of how far away from the Sun Uranus is, it takes the planet 84 years to orbit the Sun! It is also the only planet in the solar system to rotate on its side. It has faint rings around it.



Neptune

Neptune is the eighth planet. It is very cold, dark and windy. It is more than 30 times further away from the Sun than Earth is. It has six rings but they are very difficult to see.

Beyond Neptune

As well as planets, there are many other things in our solar system. Past Neptune, there is part of our solar system called the Kuiper Belt (say ky-purr). In the Kuiper Belt, there are dwarf planets (like Pluto). There are also rocks, ice and comets.