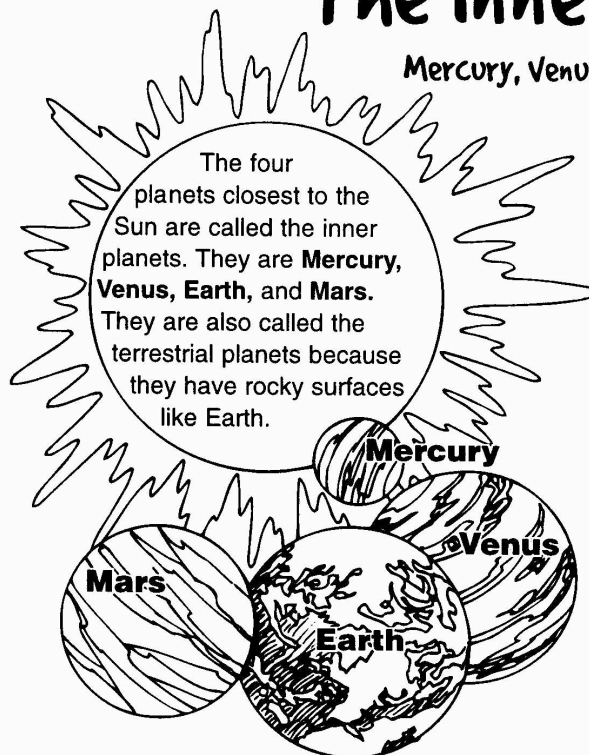


Science Shorts -6

The Inner Planets

Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars



The four planets closest to the Sun are called the inner planets. They are **Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars**. They are also called the terrestrial planets because they have rocky surfaces like Earth.

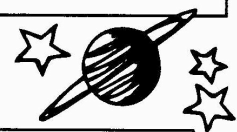
Mars was named for the Roman god of war. It is often called the "Red Planet" because of its reddish appearance when seen from space.

☉ The atmosphere of Mars is only $\frac{1}{100}$ as thick as Earth's. It is made up of 95% carbon dioxide.

☉ It is usually very cold on Mars. Only on the hottest summer days, does the temperature rise above zero.



The rest is mostly nitrogen and argon. It contains less than $\frac{1}{2}\%$ oxygen.



☉ Mars is only about half the size of Earth. It also has much less mass, weighing only about $\frac{1}{10}$ as much as Earth.



Venus was named for the Roman goddess of love and beauty. The Chinese name for Venus means "beautiful white one."

☉ Although it is farther from the Sun than Mercury, Venus is even hotter. Temperatures can climb to 900°F.



☉ Venus is surrounded by thick clouds that reflect the light from the Sun. This makes the planet easy to see from Earth, but difficult to study in detail, even with the largest telescopes.

☉ Sometimes people refer to Venus as Earth's sister planet because it is the closest planet to Earth. The two are about the same size. Both were formed about 4½ billion years ago. Both have solid surfaces and about the same density.

Mercury was named for the swift Roman messenger god who wore winged sandals. The planet moves swiftly too. It takes only 88 Earth days for Mercury to make one orbit around the Sun.



☉ Mercury is a planet of extreme temperatures. During the day, temperatures can reach over 800°F. At night, the temperature can drop to almost -300°F.



☉ Mercury is a bare and rocky planet with deep craters (holes). The craters were caused when comets and asteroids struck the surface billions of years ago.

Inner Planets Questions

1. What are the names of the 4 Inner Planets?

2. Why are they also called terrestrial planets?

3. How did Venus get its name? _____

5. Why is Venus sometimes referred to as Earth's sister?

6. How did Mars get its name? _____

7. How is the Martian atmosphere different than Earth's atmosphere?

8. What is Mars' nickname? _____

9. How big is Mars? _____

10. How did Mercury get its craters? _____

11. How did Mercury get its name? _____

12. How long does it take Mercury to orbit the Sun? _____

13. Which of the Inner Planets is covered in clouds? _____

14. Which of the Inner Planets has the most extreme day/night temperatures?

15. Which of the Inner Planets has life on it? _____

16. Which of the Inner Planets is the hottest? _____
