

Science Shorts -8

Solar Eclipse

Write your notes
about what you are
reading in this space.

Sometimes, ancient people made up stories to explain the events of nature. The Chinese made up a story about how a dragon swallows the Sun to explain a solar eclipse. A solar eclipse takes place when the Moon passes between the Sun and the Earth. For a few minutes, the Moon blocks out much of the Sun's light. The Moon makes a large shadow on the surface of the Earth. It is this shadow that causes the day to grow dim. As the Moon continues on its orbit, the shadow moves away because the Earth and Moon keep moving. An eclipse lasts only a few minutes.

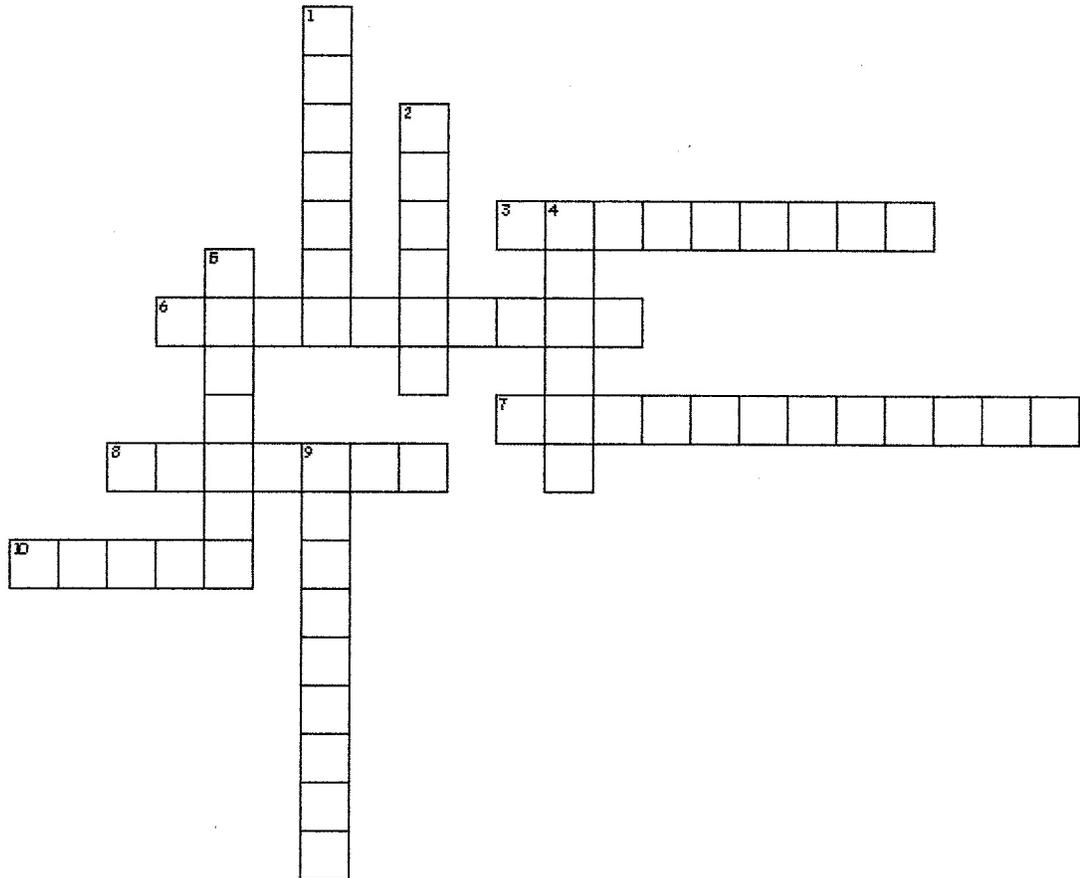
Some ancient people did study astronomy. Astronomy is the study of celestial bodies. More than 2,000 years ago, the Chinese knew the real cause of eclipses. Clay tablets have been found in Babylonia. They are over 3,000 years old. They show that the Babylonian people kept records of eclipses. Egyptians understood a lot about the movements of the objects in the sky as well. Tomb paintings show pictures of the stars and planets.

A Greek astronomer named Ptolemy lived more than 2,000 years ago. We still have the books that he wrote. These books show that he understood eclipses. He was even able to predict when they might occur. We know that people have been studying the sky for a long time.

Today, scientists still study eclipses. They want to learn more about the movements of the Sun, Moon and planets. They can tell exactly when a solar eclipse will occur. Sometimes an eclipse is total. This is when the Moon covers the Sun completely. At other times the Moon may cover only part of the Sun. This is called a partial eclipse. Scientists also know what location on Earth will be best for viewing an eclipse. Sometimes people travel long distances to experience a total eclipse of the Sun.

People now know that there is nothing to fear from a solar eclipse. We know that there are no monsters roaming the sky. No dragons to try to swallow the Sun. But a solar eclipse is still very exciting. When a dark shape covers the Sun, and the day grows strangely dim, people still have a sense of wonder.

Solar Eclipse



Across

3. The study of celestial bodies.
6. People who had clay tablets showing eclipses.
7. When the moon passes between the Sun and the earth.
8. People who know the the real cause of eclipses more than 2,000 years ago
10. Type of eclipse that covers the Sun completely

Down

1. An ancient Greek astronomer.
2. The monster that swallows the sun.
4. What causes the day to grow dim.
5. Type of eclipse that may cover only part of the Sun.
9. People who had tomb paintings showing pictures of stars and planets.