

PLANETARY FACTS

Here are some facts about the planets nearest to the Earth.

MERCURY



Named after the Roman messenger to the gods, Mercury is the smallest planet and the closest to the Sun. Thirteen times a century, it passes in front of the Sun. This is called a *transit*. The next time is 9th May 2016.

Moons: none.

Orbit period: 1 Mercury year = 88 Earth days.

Surface temperature: 427° C facing the Sun and -173° C away from the Sun, due to the planet having very little atmosphere.

VENUS



Named after the Roman goddess of love, Venus is the second planet from the Sun, can be seen as a bright object in the sky, and is similar in size to the Earth.

Moons: none.

Orbit period: 1 Venus year = 224.7 Earth days.

Surface temperature: 462° C. Its covering of cloud layers creates a greenhouse effect, trapping the heat. It is thought that Venus once had oceans but as the planet's temperature increased, they evaporated.

MARS



Named after the Roman god of war, Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun. Reddish in appearance, it is called the Red Planet. Recently, signs of water have been found.

Moons: two – Phobos and Deimos.

Orbit period: 1 Mars year = 687 Earth days.

Surface temperature: -5° C to -87° C.

Mars has been volcanic in the past. It has the biggest dust storms in the solar system, sometimes lasting for months and covering the entire surface of the planet.

JUPITER



Named after the king of the Roman gods, Jupiter is the fifth planet from the Sun, and two-and-a-half times more massive than all the other planets in the solar system combined. Its Great Red Spot is a storm that has raged for at least 350 years.

Moons: 67, including Io, Callisto, Europa and Ganymede. (It is thought that Europa has water under a frozen surface.)

Orbit period: 1 Jupiter year = 11.86 Earth years.

Surface temperature: -108° C.

1. Which of these four planets is the smallest?

2. Which planet is similar to the Earth in size?

3. Which planets have moons?

4. Which planet has the hottest surface temperature?

5. Keeping in mind that Earth takes 365 days to orbit the Sun, which of these planets take longer to orbit the Sun than the Earth?

6. **Two** of the planets experience different kinds of storms. Which planets?

7. Name the **two** places where astronomers have discovered evidence of water.

8. How often does Mercury pass between us and the Sun?

9. Draw lines to match up the planets with what they meant in Roman times.

Jupiter

Mars

Venus

Mercury

Goddess of love

Messenger of the gods

King of the gods

God of war

