**Vocabulary: Solar System**



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* Atmosphere – the layers of gases surrounding a planet, moon, or sun.
	+ The visible part of the atmosphere of gas giants is considered part of the planet itself.
* Ellipse – a flattened circle.
	+ The orbits of all planets are in the shape of ellipses. These orbits are only slightly elliptical, so they appear to be circles to the naked eye.
	+ Many comets have orbits that are very elongated.
* Gas giant – a large planet composed mainly of gas.
* Gravity – the force of attraction between all objects in the universe.
	+ Gravity is only significant when one of the objects is very large, like the Earth. There is very, very little gravitational attraction between you and your couch – but there is some!
	+ Gravity causes planets to orbit the Sun, the Moon to orbit Earth, and objects to fall to the ground.
* Inner planet – any of the four planets closest to the Sun (Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars).
	+ The distinction between “inner” and “outer” is due to the very large gap between Mars’ orbit and Jupiter’s orbit.
	+ There is a large asteroid belt between the inner planets and the outer planets.
* Orbit – the path of one body around another body, such as the path of Earth around the Sun.
* Outer planet – any of the four planets farthest from the Sun (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune).
* Planet – an object orbiting a star that is round, not itself a star, and large enough to have cleared the area around it of small objects.
	+ There are eight known planets in our solar system: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.
	+ There are three “dwarf planets” in our solar system: Ceres, Pluto, and Eris.
	+ This definition was agreed on by the International Astronomical Union in 2006. It remains controversial.
* Rocky planet – a planet having a rocky surface like Earth’s.
	+ Also called “terrestrial planet.”
* Solar system – a star and the objects that orbit it.
	+ Our solar system includes the Sun (known to scientists as “Sol”), the eight planets, and their moons.
	+ Our solar system also includes asteroids, comets, dwarf planets, and planetoids.
* Year – the period of time that it takes a planet to complete one revolution around its star.