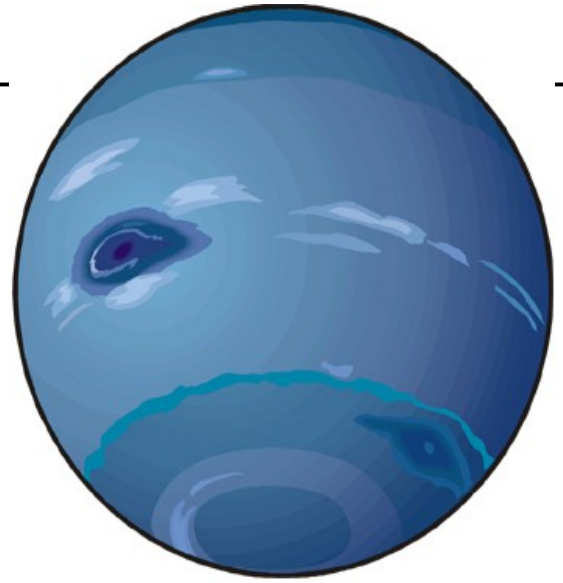


Name: _____

Neptune

by Cynthia Sherwood



Neptune is the eighth planet from the sun and the one that's the farthest away. (Pluto is even farther, but it doesn't count since most astronomers no longer consider it a planet.)

Neptune is a cold, dark place that's the smallest of the gas giants. It was named after the Roman god of water and the sea.

Neptune is a ball of gas and ice, with a rocky core. Thick bright blue clouds cover its surface. They're made up mainly of frozen methane gas. Like the other "gas giant" planets, winds that blow Neptune's clouds around are very strong. Scientists say winds reach speeds of up to 700 miles an hour (about 1,120 kilometers per hour).

Neptune isn't quite as cold as Uranus, but its largest moon, Triton, is even colder. Triton has a surface temperature of minus 390 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 234 Celsius), which is the coldest known temperature in the solar system. Scientists think that Triton used to be a large comet that became trapped by Neptune's gravity.

How it Was Named...



Neptune was named for the Roman god of the Sea. Early astronomers may have named it after the sea god because of its deep blue color.

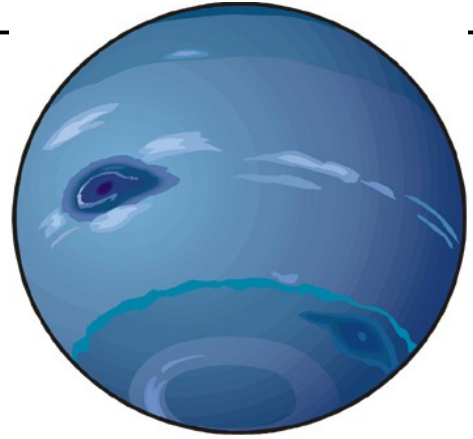
Because it's so far away, Neptune only has had one visit from a spacecraft. NASA's Voyager 2 flew by Neptune in 1989. Voyager discovered a huge storm on Neptune that it called the "Great Dark Spot," similar to Jupiter's "Great Red Spot." But later pictures from the Hubble Telescope found that the Great Dark Spot had vanished.

Luckily for us, Neptune and Earth don't have much in common. But one thing is very similar. The force of gravity pulling you down is almost the same on Neptune and Earth. Of course, if you tried to walk on Neptune, you'd be pulled in towards the center because there's no solid surface to stand on.

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1. How was Neptune's "Great Dark Spot" discovered?

2. What was Neptune's "Great Dark Spot"?

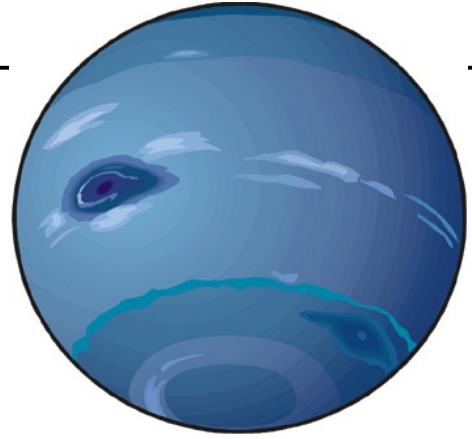
3. Why was Neptune probably named after the Roman sea god?

4. How is Neptune and Earth similar?
 - a. They are about the same size.
 - b. They both have giant dark spots.
 - c. They both have about the same amount of gravity.
 - d. They are both very cold planets.
5. Which fact about Triton is true?
 - a. Triton is a moon of Uranus.
 - b. Triton is a tiny planet near Neptune.
 - c. Triton is the windiest known place in the solar system.
 - d. Triton is the coldest known place in the solar system.
6. Which planet is further from the sun than Neptune?
 - a. Saturn
 - b. Uranus
 - c. All planets are farther than Neptune.
 - d. There are no planets further than Neptune.

ANSWER KEY

Neptune

by Cynthia Sherwood



1. How was Neptune's "Great Dark Spot" discovered?

The Voyager 2 spacecraft flew by and took a picture of it.

2. What was Neptune's "Great Dark Spot"?

A giant wind storm

3. Why was Neptune probably named after the Roman sea god?

Because of its deep blue color

4. How is Neptune and Earth similar? **c**

- a. They are about the same size.
- b. They both have giant dark spots.
- c. **They both have about the same amount of gravity.**
- d. They are both very cold planets.

5. Which fact about Triton is true? **d**

- a. Triton is a moon of Uranus.
- b. Triton is a tiny planet near Neptune.
- c. Triton is the windiest known place in the solar system.
- d. **Triton is the coldest known place in the solar system.**

6. Which planet is further from the sun than Neptune?

- a. Saturn
- b. Uranus
- c. All planets are farther than Neptune.
- d. **There are no planets further than Neptune.**