

The red planet

In the night sky, the distinctive orange-red color of Mars is easy to see with the naked eye. Mars is the outermost of the four rocky planets, and Earth's nearest neighbor. Today, its surface is a bitterly cold desert, but three billion years ago, Mars was much warmer and water flowed there.

Did you know?

Olympus Mons on Mars is the largest volcano in the solar system. It stands about 15 miles (24 km) high. That is nearly three times as tall as the highest mountain on Earth, Mount Everest.

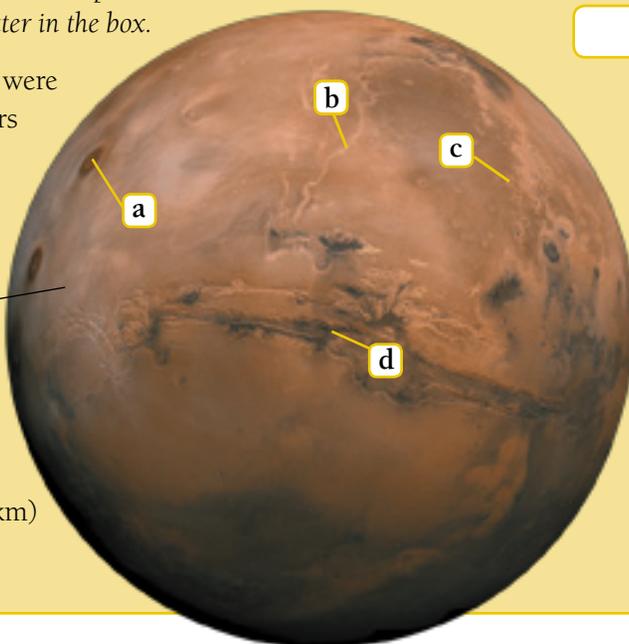
Mars in close-up

Work out which part of the picture each caption refers to, then write the correct letter in the box.

1. Lots of small craters were formed when meteors bombarded Mars 4 billion years ago.

Red color is caused by iron oxide (rust) in the rocks and soil.

2. The long slit across Mars is the Valles Marineris, a 2,800-mile (4,500-km) system of canyons.



3. The Kasei Vallis is a curved canyon north of the Valles Marineris. It was created by heavy flooding when Mars had a plentiful supply of water.

4. Dark circles on the surface of Mars are giant, extinct volcanoes.

Make some Martian dust

To make some Martian dust, you will need some sand, a tray, rubber gloves, scissors, steel wool, and water.

1 Half-fill the tray with sand. Wearing gloves, cut the steel wool into pieces and mix it into the sand. Wet the sand. Leave the tray uncovered in a safe place.

2 Check the sand every day, and add more water if it dries out. How long does it take for the sand to turn a rusty red color?

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before



after



Activity Answers

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1 c

2 d

3 b

4 a