

Mercury, the Smallest Planet



Read the passage. Then answer the questions in full sentences.

Name _____ Date _____

Mercury is the smallest planet in our solar system, just a little bigger than Earth's Moon. It is the closest planet to the Sun, and it has no moons of its own.

Like Venus, Earth and Mars, Mercury is a rocky planet. Its solid surface is covered with craters. In the daytime it can be as hot as 800 degrees Fahrenheit, and at night as cold as minus 300 degrees. Still, it is not the hottest planet: Venus is hotter.

Mercury spins slowly. It takes 59 Earth days to spin around once. But it goes around the Sun quickly: a year on Mercury is only 88 Earth days long. If you lived there, you would have a birthday about every three months.

No people have ever gone to Mercury, but two robotic spacecraft have visited it: Mariner 10 and MESSENGER.

1. Which planet is hotter than Mercury?

2. What is Mercury's surface covered with?

3. Why would you have a birthday about every three months on Mercury?

4. Would you rather visit Mercury in the daytime or at night? Why?

Answer key

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1. Which planet is hotter than Mercury?

Venus.

2. What is Mercury's surface covered with?

Craters.

3. Why would you have a birthday about every three months on Mercury?

Because a year on Mercury, one trip around the Sun, is only 88 Earth days long.

4. Would you rather visit Mercury in the daytime or at night? Why?

Sample answer: neither would be easy, because in the daytime it can be as hot as 800 degrees Fahrenheit and at night as cold as minus 300 degrees.