

Name: _____

Pluto

by Cynthia Sherwood



Poor, poor Pluto. Scientists now say it's not a true planet. Since 2006, they have called Pluto a *dwarf planet*. They believe Pluto is too small and its orbit around the sun too irregular to be the ninth planet in our solar system.

Pluto is so far away from Earth that it can't be seen without a telescope. It was only formally discovered in 1930. That's when powerful telescopes took the first photographs of Pluto. The news made huge headlines throughout the world.

Scientists received hundreds of suggestions of what to name the new planet. An eleven-year-old girl from England had the winning idea—she suggested Pluto, the name of the Roman god of the underworld. She thought the name made sense because Pluto is such a dark and icy place. The girl won five British pounds for her idea, which equals about eight American dollars.

Moons of Pluto

So far, astronomers have found three moons that orbit Pluto.

Charon, the largest moon, was discovered in 1978.

Two smaller moons were discovered in 2005. They were named Nix and Hydra.

Do you think astronomers will find any more?

Even today, scientists don't know very much about Pluto because it's so far away from us. They do know it has at least three small moons, and they think it's about one-fifth the size of Earth. Pluto is a brownish color and is covered with a thin layer of frozen methane gas.

Even if we could build a rocket that could travel to Pluto, we wouldn't want to stay for long. Because Pluto is so far away from the sun, its surface is one of the coldest in our entire solar system. If you ever cook with an adult, you know that it's common to set the oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit (190 degrees Celsius). Pluto is 375 degrees too—but 375 degrees below zero!

Name: _____



Pluto

by Cynthia Sherwood

1. Tell whether each fact is true or false.

_____ Pluto is a brownish color.

_____ Pluto's temperatures reach up to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.

2. What are the names of Pluto's three moons?

3. How long ago was Pluto first discovered?

- a. about 110 year ago
- b. about 80 years ago
- c. about 30 years ago
- d. about 5 years ago

4. Pluto was named after...

- a. an 11 year-old girl
- b. the Roman god of the underworld
- c. a famous scientist
- d. a cartoon dog

5. Jimmy told his teacher that he was laying on the grass looking up at the stars last night when he saw Pluto in the sky. His teacher didn't believe him. Why?

ANSWER KEY



Pluto

by Cynthia Sherwood

1. Tell whether each fact is true or false.

true Pluto is a brownish color.

false Pluto's temperatures reach up to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.

2. What are the names of Pluto's three moons?

Charon, Nix, and Hydra

3. How long ago was Pluto first discovered? **b**

a. about 110 year ago

b. about 80 years ago

c. about 30 years ago

d. about 5 years ago

4. Pluto was named after... **b**

a. an 11 year-old girl

b. the Roman god of the underworld

c. a famous scientist

d. a cartoon dog

5. Jimmy told his teacher that he was laying on the grass looking up at the stars last night when he saw Pluto in the sky. His teacher didn't believe him. Why?

Pluto is too small and far away to be seen without a telescope.