

# Thematic Units...



from The MAILBOX<sup>®</sup> magazine.

# An Out-Of-This-World Adventure!

## Exploring The Solar System

If you're planning a study of the solar system, be sure to consider these supplemental literature-based activities before preparing your youngsters for blastoff.

*ideas contributed by Wendy Waterman*

## Postcards From Outer Space

Take a unique trip through the solar system with the help of a one-of-a-kind book entitled *Postcards From The Planets*. This story unfolds as Jessie and Kate depart into space in the year 2095. The twosome chronicle their experiences by writing and sending postcards to their relatives living on Earth. While the book's story line is fictional, the information about the planets has been thoroughly researched. (Available as a Big Book or in packets of six small books each, *Postcards From The Planets* may be purchased from RIGBY publishers by calling 1-800-822-8661.)

After each postcard has been read and discussed, ask your students to choose the solar system locations they would most like to visit. Pair the youngsters according to their preferences; then challenge each twosome to research its destination. To complete the project, have each pair create and complete a postcard like the ones featured in the book. Display the completed projects on a bulletin board entitled "Postcards From Outer Space!"

## More About The Solar System

*The Planets In Our Solar System* by Franklyn M. Branley (published by Thomas Y. Crowell Junior Books) introduces the solar system and its nine planets. The author's simple text enables young readers and listeners to grasp basic facts about the solar system's celestial bodies. In addition directions for making two models of the solar system are given. One model shows the differences in the sizes of the planets. The second model can be displayed on a wall and shows the nine planets and their distances from the Sun. Another highly informative book about the solar system is *A Book About Planets And Stars* by Betty Polisar Reigot (published by Scholastic Inc.). Packed with information, this is another book worth considering for your solar system library.



## Solar System Extravaganza

Showcase an eye-catching reproduction of the solar system on your playground using string, nine tubes (from paper products), and tagboard cutouts to represent the Sun and each of the nine planets. Label a tube for each planet. Cut string lengths using the chart below and wrap each length of string around the appropriate tube. Use a hole puncher to punch a hole in the left side of each planet cutout. Punch either one large hole or nine small holes in the right side of the Sun cutout. Assign each of nine student groups a planet; then distribute the tubes and planet cutouts to the appropriate groups. On the playground, position the Sun cutout in an open area. Seat the students (in their groups) near the Sun cutout. Then, in turn, have each group attach one end of its string to the Sun cutout and walk away from the Sun, gently rolling out the string on its tube. When the string's end is reached, the corresponding planet is attached. Continue in this fashion until all of the planets are displayed. Wow! What a solar system!

Planet	Distance From The Sun	String Length
Mercury	36 million miles	1 yard
Venus	67 million miles	approx. 2 yards
Earth	93 million miles	approx. 2.5 yards
Mars	142 million miles	approx. 4 yards
Jupiter	484 million miles	approx. 13.5 yards
Saturn	885 million miles	approx. 24.5 yards
Uranus	1,780 million miles	approx. 49.5 yards
Neptune	2,790 million miles	approx. 77.5 yards
Pluto	3,660 million miles	approx. 101.5 yards



Jackson Crane

## Shooting Stars

The topic of shooting stars—those streaks of light that have long fascinated sky watchers—is sure to evoke an enthusiastic response from your youngsters. Ask students to share their knowledge and questions about shooting stars. Next challenge students to listen carefully as you read aloud *Shooting Stars* by Franklyn M. Branley (published by Thomas Y. Crowell Junior Books). Delightfully illustrated, this informative book explains what shooting stars are, what they are made of, and what happens when they land on Earth. At the conclusion of the book, the author states that some people believe that a wish made upon a shooting star is a wish that will come true.

After reviewing the contents of the book, create this unique class booklet of shooting-star wishes. To make a booklet page, fold a sheet of 9" x 12" construction paper in half and glue the outer edges to form a pocket. Draw and color a night sky scene on the front of the pocket and personalize the back of the pocket. Then, on a slip of paper, write and personalize your wish for a shooting star. Fold the programmed slip in half and tuck it inside the pocket. Bind the pockets between a construction-paper cover labeled "Shooting-Star Wishes." Place the completed project in your classroom library for all to enjoy.

## What Is A Black Hole In Space?

Why does lightning continuously flash on Jupiter? Why is Venus's atmosphere so hard to see through? Why do stars twinkle? All of these questions and many more can be answered using the hands-on experiments in Janice VanCleave's *Astronomy For Every Kid: 101 Easy Experiments That Really Work* (published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.). Written especially for young children, each experiment is presented with its purpose, a list of needed materials, step-by-step instructions, expected results, and a scientific explanation in terms that kids can understand. In fact, each experiment has been "child tested" by the author's own students. Using the experiments in this valuable resource, you can propel your students' science enthusiasm to extraordinary heights!

## Out-Of-This-World Poetry

Send your youngsters into orbit with this poetry-writing activity. For an inspiring introduction to space-related poetry, read aloud selected poems from *Space Songs* by poet Myra Cohn Livingston (published by Holiday House, Inc.). Display a length of colorful bulletin-board paper. Write the name of a planet at the top of the paper, and enlist from your youngsters words and phrases that describe the planet. Write each description on the paper, arranging the words in a desired fashion. When the poem is complete, ask students to join in as you read it aloud. Next divide students into small groups and give each group a length of colorful bulletin-board paper and a marker. Working as a team, have each group agree upon a space-related topic and create a poem about it. After each group has shared its poem, post the completed projects in a school hallway for others to enjoy.



## Stargazing

Turn your youngsters on to stargazing with *Seeing Stars: A Book And Poster About The Constellations* by Barbara Seiger (published by Grosset & Dunlap, Inc.). This appealing softcover book and giant-size map feature the constellations of the Northern Hemisphere. Packed with information and black-line illustrations, the book is a perfect resource for a star-studded learning center. Place the book, a white crayon, black construction paper, glue, and a supply of small stars or sequins at a center. For added appeal display the giant-size constellation map on the ceiling above the center. (For a glow-in-the-dark poster, attach the glow-in-the-dark star stickers [that accompany the book and map] as described in the book.) Using the supplies at the center, students can create each of the constellations for the current season. Bind each student's pages between a construction-paper cover, and the student has a personal stargazing guide.

## Life On Other Planets

Most youngsters (and adults!) are intrigued by the thought of extraterrestrial neighbors. In Franklyn M. Branley's book *Is There Life In Outer Space?* (published by Thomas Y. Crowell Junior Books), the author discusses several ideas and misconceptions about life in outer space. After reading the book aloud, ask youngsters to recap why most scientists do not believe there is life on the other planets in our solar system. Take a class poll to determine how many students believe that there could be other planets beyond our solar system. Also find out if they think other forms of life may or may not be living on these planets. (See "Alien Artwork" for a far-out follow-up activity!)



Pam Crane

## Alien Artwork

Send your youngsters into orbit with this totally cosmic project! To set the mood, read aloud a book that features an alien character such as *UFO Diary* by Satoshi Kitamura (published by Farrar Straus Giroux), *Earthlets As Explained By Professor Xargle* by Jeanne Willis (published by E. P. Dutton), or *Space Case* by Edward Marshall (published by Dial Books For Young Readers). Invite each student to imagine the perfect alien and illustrate it on a large sheet of drawing paper. Then have each youngster answer questions about his alien friend by completing a copy of page 7. Be sure to provide time for students to introduce their alien friends to their classmates. Far-out!

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Creative thinking/writing

## Introducing An Alien

Answer each question about the alien you illustrated.  
Use complete sentences.

1. What is this alien's name? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Where is this alien from? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How old is this alien? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What was this alien's life like before it came to Earth? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_


5. What does this alien like to eat? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What does this alien like to do for fun? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What is one thing you hope to learn from your alien friend? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What is one thing you hope to teach your alien friend? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

©The Education Center, Inc. • Solar System • Primary • TEC3194



**News Travels Fast!**

\_\_\_\_\_

soared to  
extraordinary heights

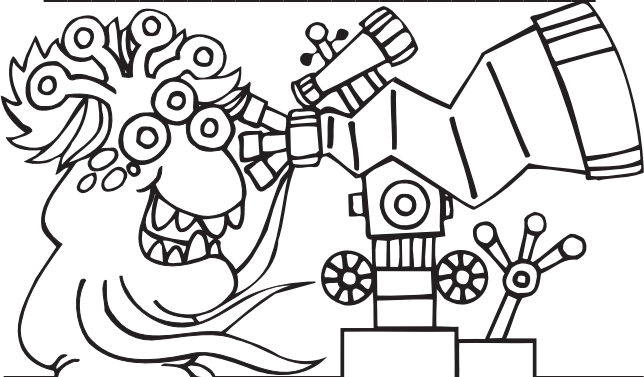
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Congratulations!**

©The Education Center, Inc.



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your thoughtfulness!**

©The Education Center, Inc.



**Mission Accomplished!**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Hooray For You!**

©The Education Center, Inc.



**Far Out,**

\_\_\_\_\_!

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**was out-of-this-world!**

©The Education Center, Inc.