

The Fourth Planet

Mars, the fourth planet from the sun, is sometimes called the "Red Planet" because its surface appears to be reddish in color. On the surface, scientists have seen craters, dry riverbeds, polar ice caps, and **inactive** volcanoes. These **sightings** have led some people to believe that there is life on Mars. However, scientists do not believe that there are any people living on Mars. In fact, many scientists do not think there is any life on Mars at all. Liquid water is required for life to exist, they argue, and there is no liquid water on Mars. The ground is frozen, and the North and South Poles are covered by ice caps. Scientists think that there may have been saltwater on the surface of Mars a long time ago, and that water could have supported some kind of life. However, they have found no real **evidence** that shows any type of life on Mars.

Still, Mars and Earth have some things in common. Both planets have polar ice caps, volcanoes, and canyons. The length of a day is similar, too. On Mars, one day is 24 hours and 37 minutes, while on Earth, one day is a little shorter—23 hours and 56 minutes. Both planets have four seasons, although the seasons on Mars are twice as long. It is much colder and drier on Mars than on Earth, and the air is too thin for humans to breathe.

Scientists continue to learn more about the atmosphere and climate on Mars. Although no humans have set foot on its rocky surface, many **unmanned** spacecraft have flown over Mars. Some have even landed on its surface. Small robotic **vehicles** called "rovers" have collected data about the environment of Mars and transmitted it back to Earth. They found evidence that, in the past, liquid water did flow on Mars. There may have been a salty ocean, too. Maybe one day we will know whether there was ever life on Mars and if the planet could support any kind of life now. Hopefully, scientists will keep exploring the fascinating fourth planet!



Courtesy NASA/JPL-Caltech

Mars rovers like this one detected the past **existence** of liquid water on the Red Planet's surface.

MONDAY

Match each word from the passage to its definition on the right.

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| inactive | • events when something is seen |
| sightings | • a sign or signs that show something is true |
| evidence | • the state of being real |
| unmanned | • not operated by a person on board |
| vehicles | • no longer able to erupt |
| existence | • machines that carry people or things from place to place |

TUESDAY

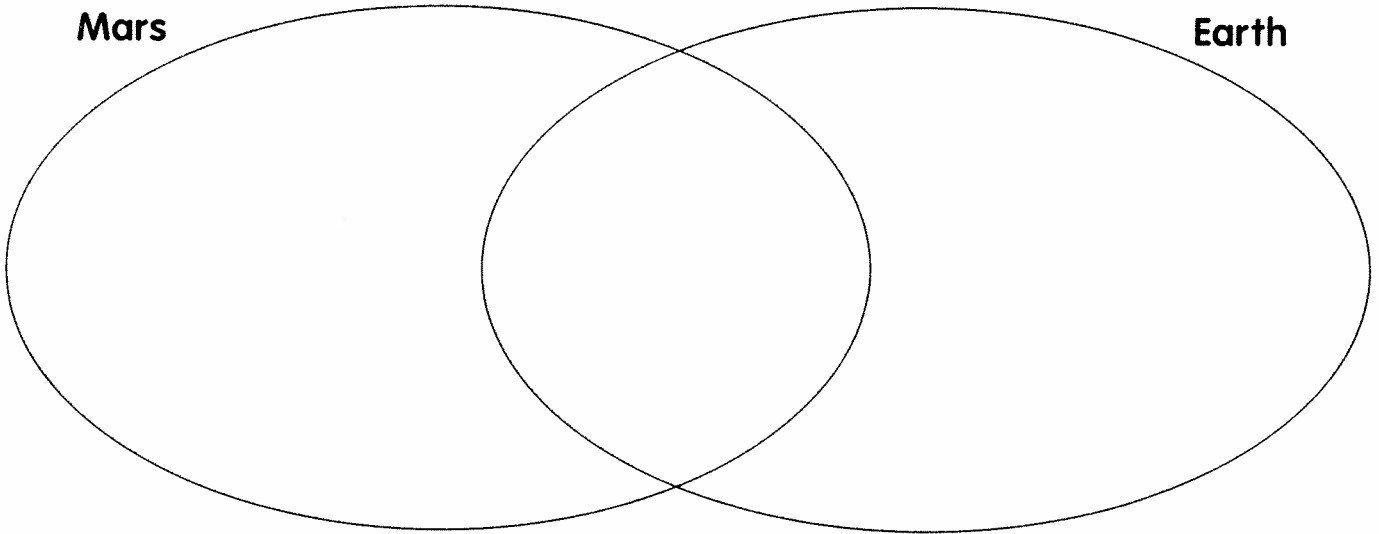
What information did you learn from the picture and caption?

WEDNESDAY

Write at least two descriptions in each section of the Venn diagram.

Mars

Earth



THURSDAY

Write T if the sentence is true. Write F if it is false.

- _____ Both Earth and Mars have days that are about 24 hours long.
- _____ Humans first set foot on Mars in 2001.
- _____ The north and south poles of Mars are covered by ice caps.
- _____ Mars is red because it has many active volcanoes.
- _____ Rovers have found evidence that life once existed on Mars.

FRIDAY

Would you like to be the first human to walk on Mars? Why or why not?
