



Dwarf Planets

Is Pluto a Planet?

Classroom Activity

Material List:

- Internet access
- Statement activity sheet
- Dwarf planets matrix sheet
- Scissors or coloured pens/pencils

Outline

In this lesson you will look at the history of the planet Pluto and decide how you would describe a number of celestial objects.

Complete activity 1 and then see how a planet is actually defined and what is different about dwarf planets.

Look at the data you have for Pluto and the other dwarf planets and complete the matrix. Compare them with the 8 planets and then take a class vote on whether you believe Pluto should be called a planet or a dwarf planet.

Procedure:

1

Look over your set of statements and decide which ones you think define a planet.

2

If you think a statement does not define a planet, make a note of what space object you think it could describe.

3

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Online Observatory: onlineobservatory.eu

The online observatory collaboration consists of the following partners:

Baldone Observatory, Brorfelde Observatory, Cardiff University, Harestua Solar Observatory, Helsinki Observatory



4

Research dwarf planets, how many are in our solar system? What are their names?

5

Fill out the matrix sheet with facts about each of the dwarf planets.

6

Compare your dwarf planet matrix with that of the main 8 planets, how do they compare?

7

Based on the activities and the information provided by your teacher take a vote on whether you believe Pluto should be called a planet or a dwarf planet?

Assessment:

- What factors suggest that Pluto should be a dwarf planet?
- Why is Mercury (the smallest planet) not considered a dwarf planet?
- How would you define the Asteroid belt? The Kuiper belt?

Further Activities:

Divide into teams, one side will debate for Pluto being reinstated as a planet and the other side will debate against this idea. Complete research in your groups, deciding on three main points to argue in favour of your side. You might find more than three reasons, so you will have to decide on what the most important ones are.

Have a debate with the other side. Have they got a convincing case? Can they sway you to their side? Do you have any arguments against their main points?