



READING PASSAGE · LEVEL 2 · ON-GRADE

MARS: OUR CLOSEST NEIGHBOUR

A reading passage for middle-grade students (Ages 8–10)

Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun and one of our closest neighbours in space. It is often called the Red Planet because of its rusty colour, which comes from iron oxide — the same stuff that makes old metal turn red.

Mars is about half the size of Earth, but a year on Mars is almost twice as long. That is because Mars is farther from the Sun and takes longer to travel around it. A day on Mars, though, is almost the same length as a day on Earth — just 40 minutes longer.

Mars has the tallest volcano in the entire solar system. It is called Olympus Mons and it is about 22 kilometres high — nearly three times taller than Mount Everest! Mars also has a giant canyon called Valles Marineris that is so long it would stretch right across the United States.

The temperature on Mars is very cold. On a summer day at the equator it might warm up to about 20°C, but at night it can drop to –73°C. The thin air on Mars cannot trap heat the way Earth's thicker atmosphere does.

Scientists have sent many robotic rovers to explore Mars. Today, rovers like Perseverance are searching for clues that tiny living things may once have lived in ancient Martian lakes.

★ WORDS TO KNOW 4 TERMS

iron oxide

Rust — what happens when iron meets air and water and turns reddish-brown.

canyon

A deep, narrow valley with steep, rocky walls.

atmosphere

The layer of air or gas around a planet.

rover

A robot vehicle that drives around on another planet.

★ COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS 5 QUESTIONS

1. What gives Mars its red colour?

2. How does a year on Mars compare to a year on Earth, and why?

3. Name two extreme features found on Mars and describe what makes them special.

4. Why is it so cold on Mars, even on a summer day?

5. What are scientists hoping to find by exploring Mars?
