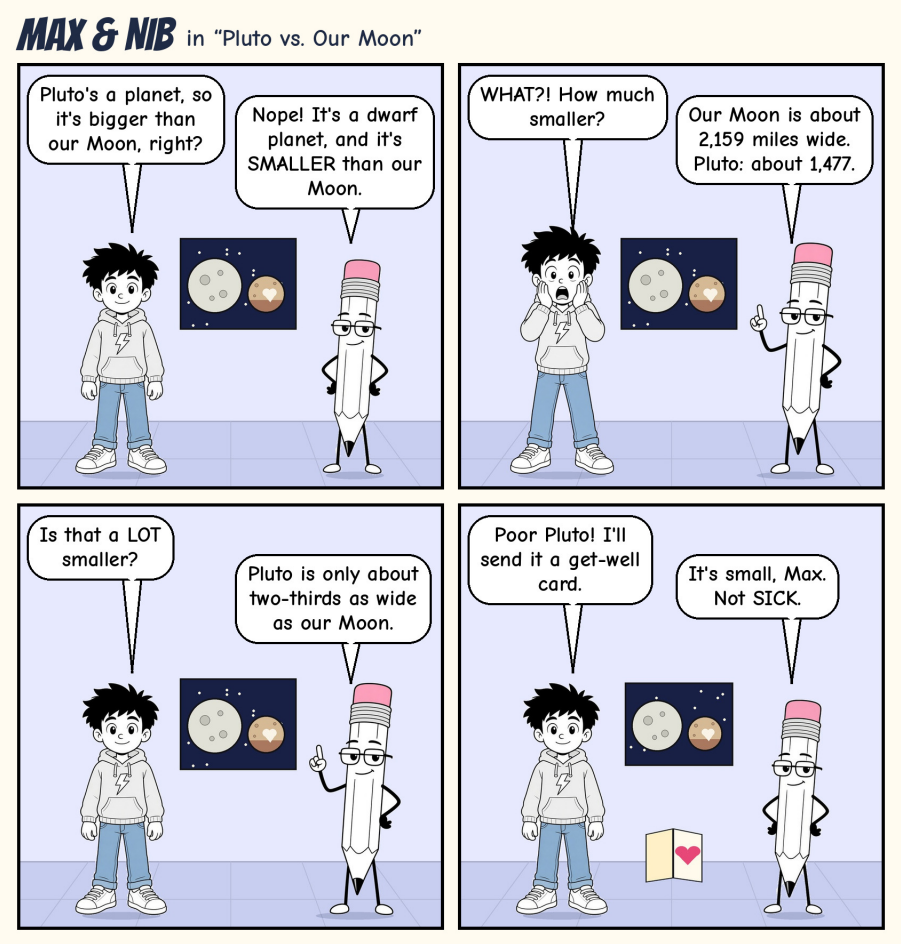


Name: _____ Date: _____

Is Pluto Smaller Than Our Moon?

Space · Grades 3–6 · About 15 minutes · Max & Nib

Cool facts

Pluto was discovered in 1930, and for 76 years it was called the ninth planet. In 2006, scientists decided to call it a dwarf planet instead. Here is a surprise: Pluto is smaller than our own Moon! Earth's Moon is about 2,159 miles wide. Pluto is only about 1,477 miles wide, so it is about two-thirds as wide as the Moon. NASA's New Horizons spacecraft flew past Pluto in 2015 and measured it up close. Pluto is very far away, about 3.7 billion miles from the Sun on average, so it is super cold. It has icy mountains, a bright heart-shaped patch of ice, and five known moons. The name Pluto was suggested by Venetia Burney, an 11-year-old girl in England.

Questions

1. Which is wider, Pluto or Earth's Moon?

2. About how wide is Pluto?

3. Since 2006, what kind of world has Pluto been called?

4. Earth's Moon is about 2,159 miles wide. Pluto is about 1,477 miles wide. How many miles wider is the Moon?

Show your work

Write about it

An 11-year-old named Pluto. If you discovered a brand-new world, what would you name it? Explain why.

Word Record A **dwarf planet** orbits the Sun and is round, but it has not cleared other objects out of its path. (NASA)

Cool Fact One trip around the Sun takes Pluto about **248 Earth years**! (NASA)

Is Pluto Smaller Than Our Moon? — Answer Key

Grades 3–6 · For teacher or parent use

Answers

1. Which is wider, Pluto or Earth's Moon?

   Earth's Moon.

2. About how wide is Pluto?

   About 1,477 miles (2,377 km).

3. Since 2006, what kind of world has Pluto been called?

   A dwarf planet.

4. Earth's Moon is about 2,159 miles wide. Pluto is about 1,477 miles wide. How many miles wider is the Moon?

   About 682 miles wider (2,159 − 1,477 = 682).

Writing prompt: An 11-year-old named Pluto. If you discovered a brand-new world, what would you name it? Explain why.
Accept any reasoned name for the writing prompt. For adults: NASA gives Pluto's equatorial diameter as about 1,477 miles (2,377 km) and the Moon's radius as about 1,080 miles (1,740 km), which is about 2,159 miles (3,475 km) across, so Pluto is about two-thirds of the Moon's width (NASA's own wording). The International Astronomical Union reclassified Pluto as a dwarf planet in 2006. Numbers are rounded, so the sheet uses “about.”

Sources

- NASA Science: Pluto Facts — https://science.nasa.gov/dwarf-planets/pluto/facts/
- NASA Science: Moon Facts — https://science.nasa.gov/moon/facts/
- NASA: How Big Is Pluto? New Horizons Settles Decades-Long Debate — https://www.nasa.gov/directorates/how-big-is-pluto-new-horizons-settles-decades-long-debate/

Cool Fact Pluto's biggest moon, **Charon**, is about half as wide as Pluto itself. (NASA)

Cool Fact Pluto's surface can get as cold as about **−400°F** (−240°C). (NASA)

Cool Fact One day on Pluto lasts about **153 hours**. (NASA)