

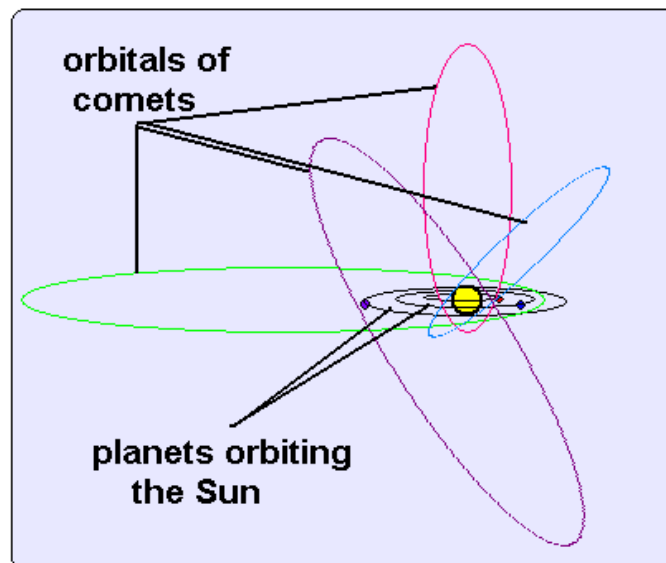
Grade 7 Natural Science Worksheet

Assessment Task: Solar system: comets

Comets

Comets may look spectacular as they move across the night sky, but a comet is just a ball of dirty ice! The central part of the comet is called the nucleus and is made up of frozen gases, ice, grit and rock. As a comet gets closer to the Sun, it begins to melt and vast plumes of melted gas and dust stream out into space behind the comet creating what is called the comet's tail.

Comets travel around the Sun in huge oval orbits. Some comets have such huge orbits that they travel right out of the solar system for thousands of years. The comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 smashed into Jupiter in July 1994 with the biggest crash ever witnessed.



Our most famous comet that orbits the Sun every 76 years is Halley's comet, named after Edmund Halley. Halley discovered the comet and predicted its arrival. We last saw Halley's Comet in 1986. It will next be visible from Earth in 2062.

Halley's Comet – think about how people respond to displays like comets in the sky.

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1. Ask your parents if they remember Halley's visit in 1986. How old were they? Did they know about the comet?
2. How old will you be when Halley visits next?
3. Halley was recorded in ancient Chinese astronomical charts and books as long ago as 240BC. What do you think the ancient Chinese thought Halley's Comet was?
4. Harold, King of England, saw the comet in 1066. He was defeated in battle by William the Conqueror at Hastings a few months later. Harold claimed that the comet had been an evil omen. The comet was embroidered on the Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts the history of that time. Discuss the idea that objects from space could be considered as evil omens. How did ancient people describe the natural world?
5. Halley's comet was seen in about 8BC. Some say it was the Bible's Star of Bethlehem. What do you think?
6. How did the ancient people of Africa explain the presence of comets in the sky?

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Suggested Solutions

Question number	Possible marks	Solution
1 – 6	Assign marks for completion of task, if necessary.	There are no “correct” or model answers here. Allow the learners to discuss their ideas freely. Some Kenyan tribes believe the sighting of a comet is an evil omen. The San people recorded comets in their paintings. There is very little recorded concerning IKS and comets. Get the learners to ask their elders!