

# Earth's Moon

## Reading Preview

### Key Concepts

- What features are found on the moon's surface?
- What are some characteristics of the moon?
- How did the moon form?

### Key Terms

- telescope • maria
- craters • meteoroids

## Target Reading Skill

**Identifying Main Ideas** As you read "The Moon's Surface," write the main idea—the biggest or most important idea—in a graphic organizer like the one below. Then write three supporting details that further explain the main idea.

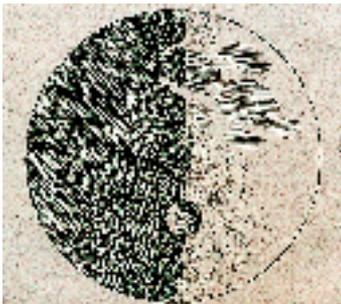
### Main Idea

The moon's surface has a variety of features, such as . . .

Detail

Detail

Detail



Lab  
zone

## Discover Activity

### Why Do Craters Look Different From Each Other?

The moon's surface has pits in it, called craters.

1. Put on your goggles. Fill a large plastic basin to a depth of 2 cm with sand.
2. Drop marbles of different masses from about 20 cm high. Take the marbles out and view the craters they created.
3. Predict what will happen if you drop marbles from a higher point. Smooth out the sand. Now drop marbles of different masses from about 50 cm high.
4. Take the marbles out and view the craters they left.



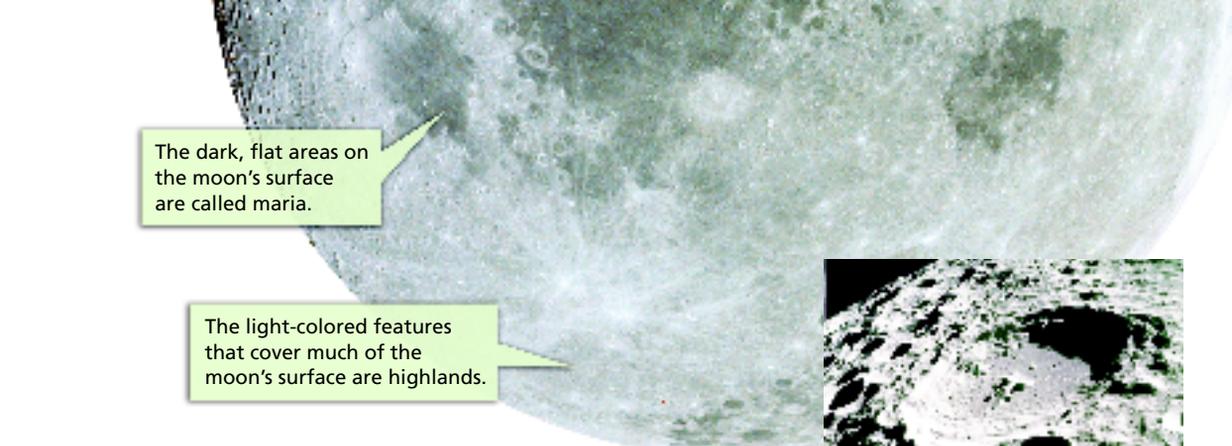
### Think It Over

**Developing Hypotheses** In which step do you think the marbles were moving faster when they hit the sand? If objects hitting the moon caused craters, how did the speeds of the objects affect the sizes of the craters? How did the masses of the objects affect the sizes of the craters?

For thousands of years, people could see shapes on the surface of the moon, but didn't know what caused them. The ancient Greeks thought that the moon was perfectly smooth. It was not until about 400 years ago that scientists could study the moon more closely.

In 1609, the Italian scientist Galileo Galilei heard about a **telescope**, a device built to observe distant objects by making them appear closer. Galileo soon made his own telescope by putting two lenses in a wooden tube. The lenses focused the light coming through the tube, making distant objects seem closer. When Galileo pointed his telescope at the moon, he was able to see much more detail than anyone had ever seen before. What Galileo saw astounded him. Instead of the perfect sphere imagined by the Greeks, he saw that the moon has an irregular surface with a variety of remarkable features.

- ◀ Galileo used a telescope to help make this drawing of the moon.



The dark, flat areas on the moon's surface are called maria.

The light-colored features that cover much of the moon's surface are highlands.

## The Moon's Surface

Recent photos of the moon show much more detail than Galileo could see with his telescope. **Features on the moon's surface include maria, craters, and highlands.**

**Maria** The moon's surface has dark, flat areas, which Galileo called **maria** (MAH ree uh), the Latin word for "seas." Galileo incorrectly thought that the maria were oceans. The maria are actually hardened rock formed from huge lava flows that occurred between 3 and 4 billion years ago.

**Craters** Galileo saw that the moon's surface is marked by large round pits called **craters**. Some craters are hundreds of kilometers across. For a long time, many scientists mistakenly thought that these craters had been made by volcanoes. Scientists now know that these craters were caused by the impacts of **meteoroids**, chunks of rock or dust from space.

The maria have few craters compared to surrounding areas. This means that most of the moon's craters formed from impacts early in its history, before the maria formed. On Earth, such ancient craters have disappeared. They were worn away over time by water, wind, and other forces. But since the moon has no liquid water or atmosphere, its surface has changed little for billions of years.

**Highlands** Galileo correctly inferred that some of the light-colored features he saw on the moon's surface were highlands, or mountains. The peaks of the lunar highlands and the rims of the craters cast dark shadows, which Galileo could see. The rugged lunar highlands cover much of the moon's surface.

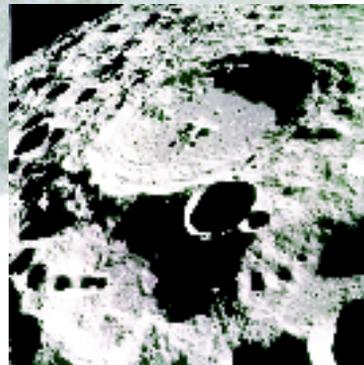


FIGURE 18

### The Moon's Surface

The moon's surface is covered by craters, maria, and highlands. Craters on the moon formed from the impact of meteoroids. Most large craters are named after famous scientists or philosophers.

**Observing** What are the light regions in the top photograph called?



What are maria?



For: Links on Earth's moon  
Visit: [www.Scilinks.org](http://www.Scilinks.org)  
Web Code: scn-0614



FIGURE 19

### The Moon's Size

The diameter of the moon is a little less than the distance across the contiguous United States.

**Calculating** What is the ratio of the moon's diameter to the distance between Earth and the moon?

## Characteristics of the Moon

Would you want to take a vacation on the moon? At an average distance of about 384,000 kilometers (about 30 times Earth's diameter), the moon is Earth's closest neighbor in space. Despite its proximity, the moon is very different from Earth. **The moon is dry and airless. Compared to Earth, the moon is small and has large variations in its surface temperature.** If you visited the moon, you would need to wear a bulky space suit to provide air to breathe, protect against sunburn, and to keep you at a comfortable temperature.

**Size and Density** The moon is 3,476 kilometers in diameter, a little less than the distance across the United States. This is about one-fourth Earth's diameter. However, the moon has only one-eightieth as much mass as Earth. Though Earth has a very dense core, its outer layers are less dense. The moon's average density is similar to the density of Earth's outer layers.

**Temperature and Atmosphere** On the moon's surface, temperatures range from a torrid 130°C in direct sunlight to a frigid 2180°C at night. Temperatures on the moon vary so much because it has no atmosphere. The moon's surface gravity is so weak that gases can easily escape into space.

**Water** The moon has no liquid water. However, there is evidence that there may be large patches of ice near the moon's poles. Some areas are shielded from sunlight by crater walls. Temperatures in these regions are so low that ice there would remain frozen. If a colony were built on the moon in the future, any such water would be very valuable. It would be very expensive to transport large amounts of water to the moon from Earth.

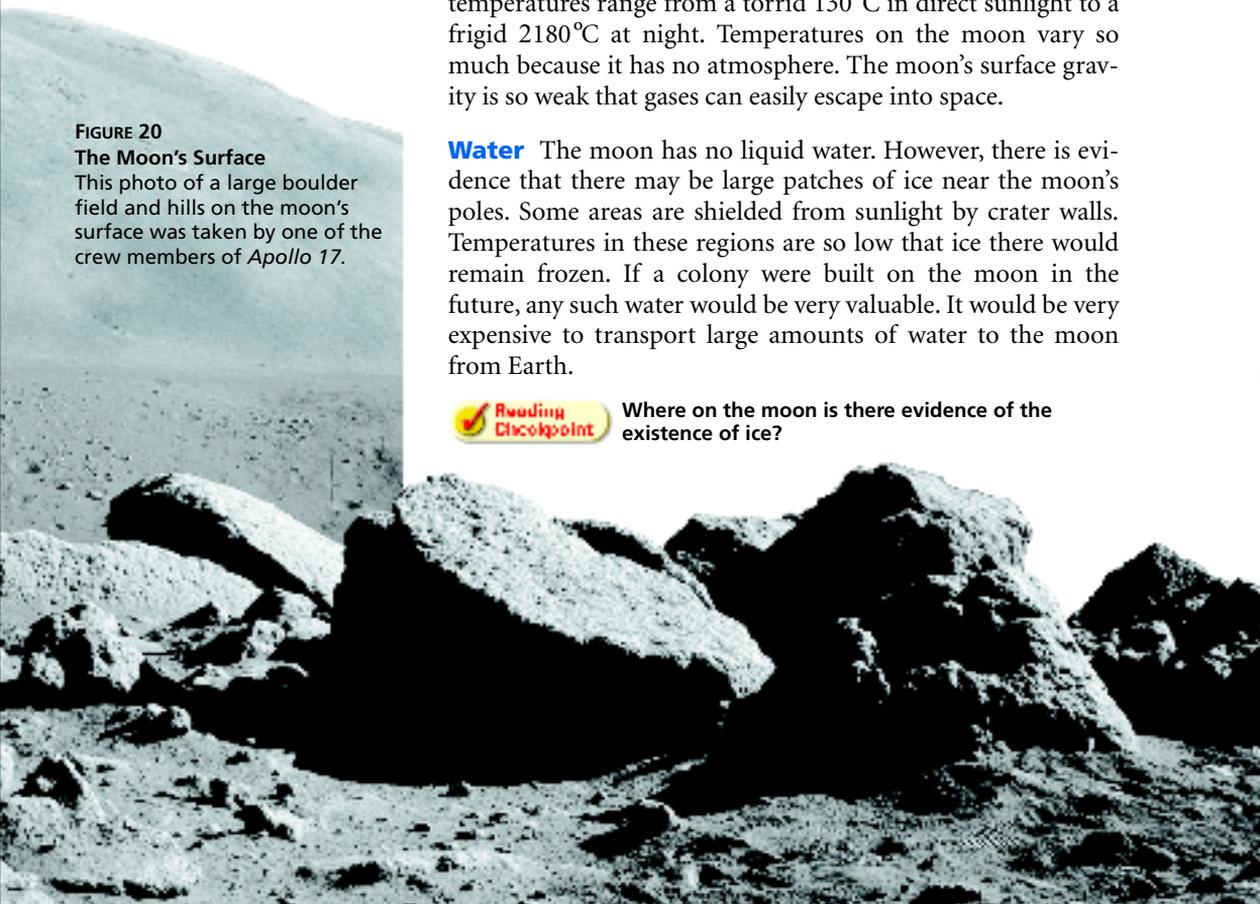
FIGURE 20

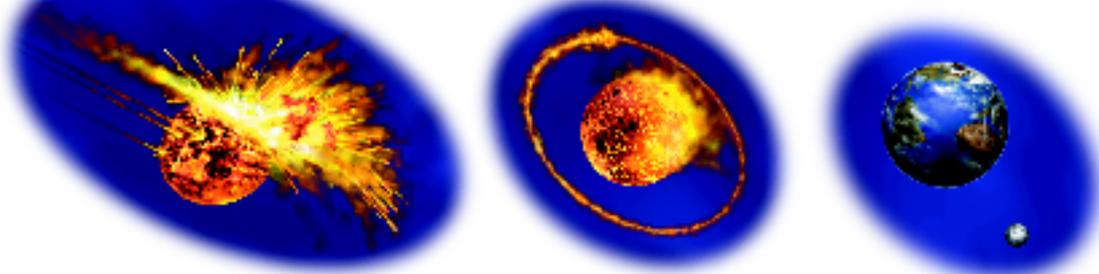
### The Moon's Surface

This photo of a large boulder field and hills on the moon's surface was taken by one of the crew members of *Apollo 17*.



Where on the moon is there evidence of the existence of ice?





## The Origin of the Moon

People have long wondered how the moon formed. Scientists have suggested many possible theories. For example, was the moon formed elsewhere in the solar system and captured by Earth's gravity as it came near? Was the moon formed near Earth at the same time that Earth formed? Scientists have found reasons to reject these ideas.

The theory of the moon's origin that seems to best fit the evidence is called the collision-ring theory. It is illustrated in Figure 21. About 4.5 billion years ago, when Earth was very young, the solar system was full of rocky debris. Some of this debris was the size of small planets. **Scientists theorize that a planet-sized object collided with Earth to form the moon.** Material from the object and Earth's outer layers was ejected into orbit around Earth, where it formed a ring. Gravity caused this material to combine to form the moon.



**Reading  
Checkpoint**

What theory best explains the moon's origin?

FIGURE 21

### Formation of the Moon

According to the collision-ring theory, the moon formed early in Earth's history when a planet-sized object struck Earth. The resulting debris formed the moon.



*Earth, Moon, and  
Sun*

[Video Preview](#)

[▶ Video Field Trip](#)

[Video Assessment](#)

## Section 4 Assessment



### Target Reading Skill **Identifying Main Ideas**

Use your graphic organizer to help you answer Question 1 below.

#### Reviewing Key Concepts

- Identifying** Name three major features of the moon's surface.
  - Explaining** How did the moon's craters form?
  - Relating Cause and Effect** Why is the moon's surface much more heavily cratered than Earth's surface?
- Describing** Describe the range of temperatures on the moon.
  - Comparing and Contrasting** Compare Earth and the moon in terms of size and surface gravity.

- Relating Cause and Effect** What is the relationship between the moon's surface gravity, lack of an atmosphere, and temperature range?
- Describing** What was the solar system like when the moon formed?
    - Sequencing** Explain the various stages in the formation of the moon.

Lab  
zone

### At-Home Activity

**Moonwatching** With an adult, observe the moon a few days after the first-quarter phase. Make a sketch of the features you see. Label the maria, craters, and highlands.