What Makes A Planet a Planet?
A Great Story Parable,
By Connie Barlow, revised and added to by Sally Beth and Carson Shore
Original version at www.TheGreatStory.org/Pluto.html

NARRATOR Once upon a time, not so long ago, the nine planets were all playing in their orbits around the Sun, like planets like to do. Jupiter was stirring its Great Red Spot. Venus and Uranus were playing peek-a-boo through thick clouds. Mars was kicking up a storm of red dust, and Saturn was smoothing its rings. Our own lovely Earth, of course, was enjoying the wind whipping through its tall trees, the memory of dinosaurs, nights at the opera, and dancing with the Moon. Just then, a comet made of ice approached Pluto. The Comet was doing exactly what comets like to do: testing how close it might fly by a stranger without being captured.

PLUTO Ho there, Comet…. Hey, is that you, Halley, the one that travels around our solar system and comes back every century?

COMET That’s me! (sing Haley Comet) so, that’s who I am. Who are you, and aren’t you lost, little space rock?

PLUTO "Hey! I’m not a Space Rock. I’m a Planet. My name is Pluto, and I am the ninth planet in the Solar System."

HALEY COMET HM…..That may be what you think, but I can tell from the slant of your orbit that you are not like the others. You are different. And I have heard that the Sun is not really your parent star.

PLUTO: The Sun not my parent star?!? You are wrong! The Sun is my Mother-Father!

(HALLEY COMET GIVES PLUTO A COLD STARE)

PLUTO: Well, I do sometimes wonder why my orbit is different from the rest. All the other planets glide around the Sun, as if skating on the surface of a vast pond. Yet I plunge through that surface at an angle, sometimes above the other planets and sometimes below.

COMET And, even stranger, once in a while you even cross over inside of Neptune’s orbit. When that happens, Neptune becomes the outermost planet, not you.

PLUTO I thought I was the only one who knew about that! You won’t tell on me, will you? (looks sad)

COMET (becoming kind) No, I won’t tell… [move closer] Oh, hey, I’m sorry I said anything. You know, I might be wrong. (pause, then brightly) Tell you what, if
you will turn down your gravitational force for awhile, you can come with me on my journey into the solar system. Along the way, we’ll learn more about your neighbors, and maybe that will help you learn more about who you are….

NARRATOR Pluto was excited to come and turned down his gravity. Halley Comet curved a long icy tail around the little planet. Thus began Pluto’s journey toward the very center of the solar system, in the company of a comet. One by one, Pluto and the comet would meet and greet the other planets.

HALLEY COMET (curve arm.-tail. around Pluto, and begin moving together toward Neptune)

"Ho there, Neptune, we are out and about roving though the solar system, trying to figure out who we are! Tell us, how do you know that you are a planet?

NEPTUNE Certainly! Whenever I look in toward my Mother-Father Sun, I can see all my sibling planets, just like boats sailing across the surface of a sea. In fact I was named by Earthlings for NEPTUNE, Roman God of the Sea. YEP, that’s how I know that I am a true planet of this solar system. (Nods with certainty)

PLUTO You mean that you see them all, like flat? HM. That is not how I see the other planets. I see them from an angle, and they look chaotic, more like snowflakes swirling in a blizzard, every which way! And I’m named for a Roman God alright, but I’m kind of ashamed of being called for the god of the underworld.

COMET Thank you, Neptune. You’ve answered our question. Seeya.

(Haley Comet and Pluto keep walking slowly with Pluto around the stage while narrator speaks)

NARRATOR The journey continued. Haley Comet called out to each planet the same way, and each time the response left Pluto feeling less and less like a planet.

COMET Hey Uranus! How are you doing? Can you tell us what makes you a planet?

URANUS Why, it’s obvious, I have a serious atmosphere. My atmosphere is made up of a gas called methane. The methane makes these incredible clouds and turns them this lovely blue-green color. (fluffing out her clouds, very enamored with herself.) Also, my atmosphere is what separates me from the rest of space. (gives a little wave and runs off)

COMET Thanks Uranus. (Looks at Pluto.) You hear that? Clouds, Pluto, you got any?

PLUTO Well not really… just a few really really high ones, these streaky thinks, but they are barely attached to me.
COMET Hey Saturn, how about you, how come you’re a planet?

SATURN Why, my rings just make me, of course, aren’t they magnificent? I mean, ask anyone to draw a planet, and they’ll put a ring on it—it’s just natural! They reflect the light of the Mother-Father Sun, so beautifully! So I say, if you wanna be a planet, you gotta have rings!

COMET Um, well, thanks a lot for your insight, Saturn, we’ll head for Jupiter now.

SATURN Well, remember to keep your distance! You remember what happened to Comet Shoemaker-Levy back in ’94? (Stagehand runs on stage with a sign explaining the comet collision) I saw it all, and it wasn’t pretty!

COMET Good Point (looking frightened, keeps a safe distance, calling as if from far away) Hey Jupiter! Can you tell us if you are a planet and why?

JUPITER (Laughing) Why, I’m so big, I’m whatever the heck I want to be! (sing Jupiter song) No question, I AM A PLANET!

(Pluto and Comet just look at each other while Jupiter struts away. Pluto looks a bit downcast.)

PLUTO Hey, what’s that red planet over there?

COMET That’s Mars.

MARS (does this little defensive sword-fighter move) HEEAH! STOP! Don’t come any closer! I don’t want to be disturbed, I’ve been having all these little cars land on me since the 1970s and I’m sick of them! HEE YAH! (Continues Karate-esque defensive moves)

COMET Don’t worry about Mars, Pluto, he has had a lot of traffic lately, and he was always kind of violent to begin with. (Turning to Earth, who is now on stage) Ah, here we are at one of my favorite planets, Earth! Hi Earth, we are trying to figure out what it takes to be a planet.

EARTH (Looks up from its trees, which are blowing around, grinning) Oh, hi, these are some of my amazing lifeforms. Well, I know I’m a planet because I’m teeming with life. These trees take Mother-Father Sun’s light energy and turn it into (gobbling, eating hungrily) food! And of course, I also have a moon, allow me to introduce you:

The MOON (running around Earth) It takes me 28 days to go around the earth!

(sing Terra Luna)
(dance ends, audience partners sit down, chorus goes back behind curtains)

COMET Come on Pluto, let’s push on. Hello Venus! Venus, where are you? (looking around) Ah, there you are, I see you, peaking out from behind the clouds. Won’t you come out, just for a few minutes to answer a question for us today?

VENUS (whispers) What did you want to know?

COMET How is it that you are a planet?

VENUS Oh, that’s easy…..

(sings VENUS song, becomes more outgoing until end)

COMET Well, it certainly is sizzling hot around here, thank goodness there’s only one more planet to go. Mercury. (panting, fanning itself) Please, tell us how you know that you are a planet?

MERCURY (Zipping around) How do I know I am a planet? Well, hit it, guys!

(sings Mercury song)

I know I am a planet because my surface temperature is hot like the sun itself Sun. It is hot enough to melt lead. That’s how I know!

PLUTO I am not at all hot. At least not when I am in my own orbit. (really, sweating, looking hot) In fact, I’m really, really cold!

COMET Thanks, Mercury. Catch ya next century (turning away, guides Pluto back towards home)

NARRATOR Halley Comet turned sharply, with Pluto still snug in the curve of its tail. The two headed back toward the cool relief of the outer solar system.

PLUTO (in despair) Oh, Halley! Our journey is over, and I am quite sure now that I am not a planet. (removes Planet Pluto sign and throws it down)

NARRATOR There was nothing Halley Comet could do to comfort Pluto, except stroke the would-be planet tenderly with a somewhat melted icy tail. All of a sudden their journey came to a standstill. Neither Pluto nor the comet could move, even an inch. Something was holding them back.

PLUTO Whew! I have never felt this much gravity coming from Mother-Father Sun before. Something is definitely wrong!

SUN It is only to remind you, Pluto, that wherever you go, you are forever held within my gravitational embrace.
PLUTO: Mother-Father Sun! It is you!"

SUN Yes, dear planet Pluto. Let me tell you about your Grandmother. She was a giant star that became a supernova 5 billion years ago, and she created all the matter that makes up you, me, and everyone else in our system! So, you are made from stars, and I love, you, little planet.

PLUTO: You just called me a planet! Am I really a planet? Am I your planet?"

SUN: Indeed you are! Earth doesn’t have rings like Saturn, yet Earth is a planet. Mercury is not big like Jupiter, but Mercury is a planet. Mars is missing the thick atmosphere of Uranus, yet Mars is a planet. Neptune has no trees, yet Neptune is a planet.

PLUTO What, then, makes us all planets?

SUN It is the one thing you all share. You all share my loving, gravitational embrace. That is what holds you in your orbits. (Pluto jumps with joy).

SUN: It is true that you, Pluto, are different from the rest. Your orbit is slanted because you came to me from outside my original family of planets. You are my adopted planet. But I hold you in my embrace no less than any of my other planets.

NARRATOR The most important thing that Pluto learned was that they were all created together, as a result of the same Supernova explosion, all part of the wonder of the Universe. And EVERYONE is made from stars, and thus has the ability to shine brightly. (sing Shine like a Morning Star)

SUN So go now, dear planet, off with Halley, and keep spinning, keep orbiting, keep on shining brightly!

NARRATOR Pluto and Icy Comet happily returned to the outer reaches of the Solar System, where Pluto promptly fell asleep, dreaming happy dreams, as planets are like to do. . . But wait! Our story is not yet over. . . Many years have passed since that grand adventure. Halley Comet is still seeing how close it can fly by planets and big space rocks without risking capture. And Pluto is still orbiting on a slant. . . But now, whenever Halley Comet visits Pluto, this is how they greet one another:

PLUTO: Ho there, Halley Comet!

COMET Ho there, Planet Pluto!
MUSIC FOR
WHAT MAKES A PLANET A PLANET?
Unless otherwise stated, songs are from Michael Stein and Bryan Smith’s Ride Through the Solar System; Caedmon Audio 1987 ISBN 0898456622

Planets
From Marz Barz
Words and music by Bob Reid with Cricket Baker and Susan Kidd's 3rd Grade Class,
Daves Avenue Elementary School, Los Gatos, CA
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Mercury is hot
Like being in a pot
Venus is much hotter like boiling in hot water
Earth it feels just right
Either day or night
Mars is big and red
I can see it from my bed
Though Jupiter is round
There isn’t any ground
They say the rings of Saturn
They light of like a lantern
Uranus it is green
when it can be seen
Telescopes can see Neptune
I hope I get one pretty soon
Pluto’s cold as ice
It’s no one’s Paradise
The gravity of the Sun
Holds them all as one.

Haley Comet (in A)

I’m Haley (Haley ) Comet (Comet)
That’s me I’m one and the same,
Haley predicted my return
and that’s how I got my name!

I’m Haley (Haley) Comet (Comet)
I wanna make that clear
I make a trip around the sun each 76 years.

People have seen me from the earth since they first looked to the sky
They didn’t know what to think of me, they thought I was a scary guy!
They called me a “sword of doom” and a “great big heavenly broom”
‘til Haley gave me his great name, said I’d be returning soon.

I’m Haley (Haley) Comet (Comet)
That’s me I’m one and the same,
Haley predicted my return and that’s how I got my name.

I’m Haley (Haley) Comet (Comet)
I wanna make that clear
I make a trip around the sun each 76 years.
(Bridge)

I’m Haley (Haley) Comet (Comet)
That’s me I’m one and the same,
Haley predicted my return and that’s how I got my name.

I’m Haley (Haley) Comet (Comet)
I wanna make that clear
I make a trip around the sun each 76 years.

Now that folks know who I am, they don’t view me with fear
They think I’m kind of special—star attraction of the year!
They know when they see me, it’s a once in a lifetime thing.
It makes me so happy, so come on folks, let’s all sing!

I’m Haley (Haley) Comet (Comet)
That’s me I’m one and the same,
We can all be better friends, now that you know my name.

I’m Haley (Haley) Comet (Comet)
That’s me I’m one and the same,
We can all be better friends, now that you call me by my name.

**Jupiter**  *(in A)*

Jupiter  *(Ja-uu-pi-ter)*
Jupiter  *(Ja-uu-pi-ter)*
Jupiter  *(Ja-uu-pi-ter)*
Jupiter  *(Ja-uu-pi-ter)*
Jupiter  *(Ja-uu-pi-ter)*

Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system
Jupiter, one-tenth the size of the sun

I’m Jupiter, if you come close I will pull on you.
I’ll change your course to an orbit that will be brand new.

If I was bigger, I could’ve been a sun
But I’m still prouder than almost anyone

Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system
Jupiter, one-tenth the size of the sun

I’ve got many moons, that I don’t ever let go
They orbit me, just like the planets do the sun
A little family that I can keep in tow
A Jupiter system that I can call my own.

Jupiter (Ja-uu-pi-ter)
Jupiter (Ja-uu-pi-ter)
Jupiter (Ja-uu-pi-ter)
Jupiter (Ja-uu-pi-ter)

Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system
Jupiter, one-tenth the size of the sun

I’m Jupiter I’m always covered in clouds
With rain and thunder
If you could hear me I’d be very loud
So take my warning leave as fast as you can
I don’t want to hurt you, won’t you please understand.

Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system
Jupiter, one-tenth the size of the sun
(repeat and fade)

Terra Luna (square dance in D)

Terra Luna!
The earth and the moon –a
Cosmic dance around the sun

I know a dance around the sun
Called Terra Luna
It’s a whole lot of fun
Terra’s the earth, Luna’s the moon,
Find a partner, we’ll be dancing soon.

Everyone have a partner? GOOD!
Now pick a sun, who’s it gonna be?
Only one sun for you and me
Sun in the middle, turn in place
Stay right there with a smile on your face
Are you the sun?
Give me a nice warm smile
Now take your partner
In your hands
In a great big circle we will stand
Circle the sun around we go
How many times have you been around the sun? (Three)
That means you are three years old, right? (Right)
Summer, winter, spring, fall,
Once around you’ve seen them all.
Do it twice, two years go by,
Keep on turning, watch time fly!
(How do you make time fly?
Throw a clock out the window!)

Now drop hands, and swing your friends
Swing them ‘till the music ends
Circle the sun, as you swing,
With a hoop and a holler, let’s all sing!
Terra Luna, the Earth and the Moon-a
Cosmic dance around the sun
Yee—hah!!!!

VENUS  in Em

Do you know someone who is very shy?
Head always in the clouds won’t look you in the eye…
They always like to be a mystery
That is me,

I am Venus
Sizzling hot
Venus
So shy
A LOT!

You think I’m beautiful, but you don’t know
beneath my clouds it is always raining so
I capture the heat of the sun and I keep it here
What an atmosphere!

I am Venus
Sizzling hot
Venus
A LOT!

When you see the evening star you admire me
My clouds reflect the light so that you may see
Like wearing sunglasses it works perfectly
Lucky for me,

Venus
Sizzling hot
Venus
So shy….
A LOT!

Sizzling hot
Shhhhhhhhh
A LOT!

So shy……
Venus……venus……so shy……venus…….(fade)

**Mercury** (bluegrass style)

Chorus:  
*Mercu*ry! close*st planet to the sun*

*Mercu*ry! Run, planet, run

Naked to the sun I stand,
No air protects my home
The solar wind surrounds me
and I am all alone

My face is marked with craters
Like the moon you see from Earth
Big volcanoes and meteors
Have scarred me since….. my birth!

Chorus:  
*Mercu*ry! close*st planet to the sun*

*Mercu*ry! Run, planet, run

Now have you seen my shadow?
Its always cold at night
While on the other side of me,
It’s always day and bright!

I don’t have time to stick around
And nothing sticks on me…
88 days around the sun
seems like a year to me.

Chorus:    Mercury! closest planet to the sun
           Mercury! Run, planet, run

Mercury…….. that’s me!
I Am The SUN
by Carson Shore
(Call and respond, a la “The Bear Song”)

I am the sun   *I am the sun (simile)*

So Big and Round

I weigh over

5 google pounds

I’m what gives you light

So early in the morn

I’ve been the source of heat

Since the day I was born

I really am a star

Like the ones you see at night

But I’m so close to you at day

I block out their light

I’m a big ball of gas

Just caught on fire

I’m over a billion times bigger

Than a whole empire

You know I won’t live forever

Some day my time will come

So enjoy me while you can

And lets have lots of fun!
Shine Like a Star
From Marz Barz (Bob Reid Music)
Words and Music © by Minnie O’Leary

When I look out in the night
I can see a million lights
I can see a million stars
People like you and I
We sparkle like the sky
Just by being who we are

Chorus:
Shine like a morning star
Spreading light from near to far
Feeling proud of who you are
Shine like a Star
Each star has it’s place to be
Gazing through eternity
Together they light up all the sky
Different as we all may be
This old world needs you and me
Needs the special light we have to share

Chorus:
There is no one just like you
There is no one just like me
We are all one of a kind
In this great big universe
there’s a place for all of us
A place to grow a place to dream

Chorus