

CURIOSITY AT HOME

MAKE A SUNDIAL



The hours of sun increase each day, until we reach the Summer Solstice on June 21st, when the sun is highest in the sky and we have our longest day of the year in the northern hemisphere. Observe the patterns of the sun moving across the sky by making a sundial to measure time!

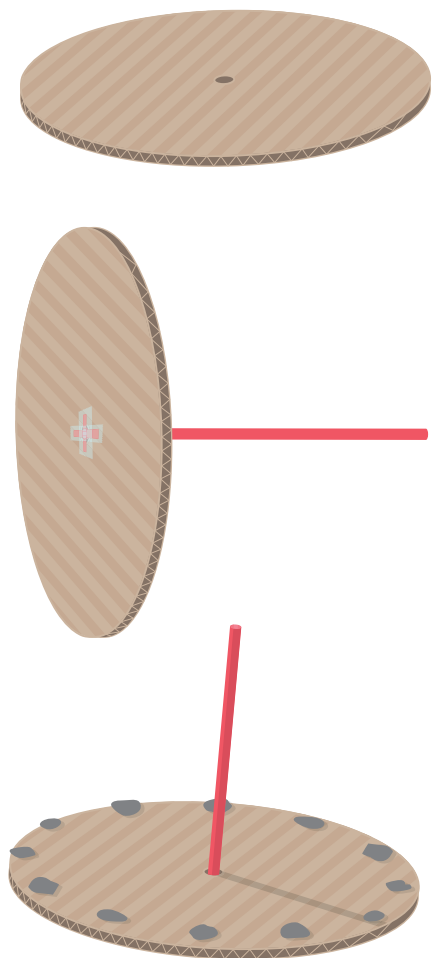
MATERIALS

- Paper plate or piece of cardboard
- Gnomon (can be a straw, pencil or a thin dowel)
- Tape
- Watch
- Scissors
- Markers
- 12 stones (optional)
- Paint (optional)
- Science notebook (or paper)
- Something to write with

PROCEDURE

- Cut out a circle of cardboard about 10 inches in diameter, or use a paper plate. This will become the base of your sundial.
- Put a small hole in the center of your circle. Insert the vertical pole, known as a gnomon. This is the item that will cast the shadow on your sundial. If you use a straw, you can make a few snips in the end to open up on the backside of the flat surface and tape it down for stability. Make sure your pole will stay in place, using tape.
- (Optional) Paint numbers 1–12 on 12 small stones.
- Carry your sundial outdoors with your watch and some stones (or a marker) ready. Do this on a sunny day, between the hours of 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. works best.
- On each hour, mark the location of the shadow on the sundial base. Refer to your watch to determine what hour it is. Write the number on the sundial base at the spot where the shadow falls, or place the corresponding stone. When you record the first hour, slightly tilt the gnomon towards that number and leave it tilted at that angle for the rest of the time.
- Check your sundial each hour, on the hour, and mark the shadow's location with your marker or painted stone. Continue forming your sundial face, with numbers 1–12, just like a clock.

TIP: Be sure to stand in the same place every time you record a new number on your clock for more accurate results.



Experiment continued on next page...



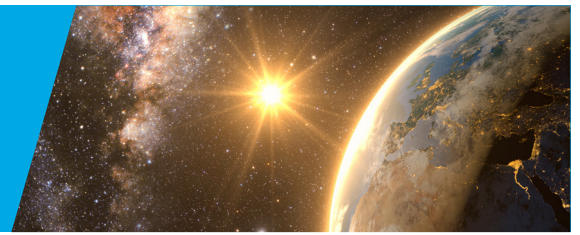
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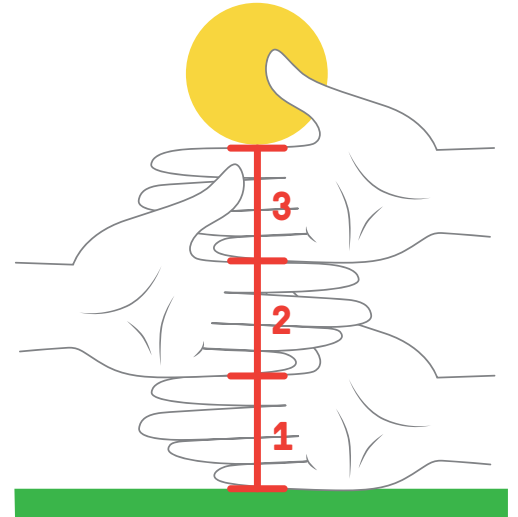
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EXPLORE MORE

Try out another way to tell time, with the width of your hand! It is best for figuring out the number of hours until sunset, but you can also use it to deduce time IF you know when sunset is, AND you can see the sun. Reach one hand out, fully extended in front of you with palm facing you, and line up the edge of your pinky with the horizon (or an estimate of the horizon if there are objects blocking your view). The distance to the top of your forefinger represents ONE HOUR. Use your other hand to stack one hand on top the next until you reach the bottom edge of the sun. If you have 3 hand widths to the bottom edge, its 3 hours until sunset! Be mindful not to look directly at the sun to avoid damaging your eyes!



DID YOU KNOW?

Sundials are the oldest known instrument for telling time. They are found all over the world, and were used before clocks, watches and electricity. The oldest known sundial dates back to 700 BCE, although there are even older versions that consist of simply a vertical pillar. The vertical stick, placed at the center of a sundial, is called a gnomon. As the sun moves across the sky, the gnomon casts a shadow all around onto the flat surface. We can mark these places on the surface, with rocks, sticks, numbers or other objects to serve as indicators of the time of day.



Examples of sundials from around the world.

Experiment continued on next page...



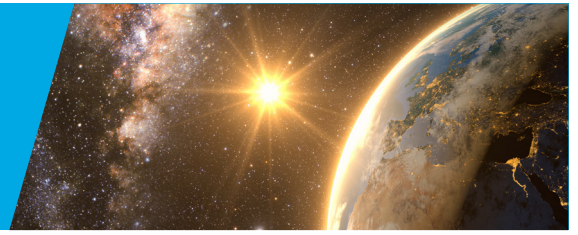
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6-8 GRADE EXPLORATION

Explore the following questions and ideas and write your observations, and questions in your science notebook.

- What are the basic principles of a sundial? Could you make a vertical sundial instead of a horizontal sundial? What about a sundial with a different sized gnomon? Make a new sundial of your own design.
- Investigate your local sundials. Sundials can be found in many towns, on walls of public places, schools, and parks. Do some research and write notes about a sundial in your region.
- Try this activity extension to make your sundial more accurate:
 - o First look up the latitude of your location. Latitude is a measurement of distance from the equator. Your latitude should be listed as a number of degrees, for example Pacific Science Center is located at a latitude of 47 degrees north.
 - o Next, you will angle the vertical gnomon of your sundial to same angle of your latitude. Stand the long side of a protractor upright on the ground, and measure the angle for the degree of latitude for your location. Then tilt the gnomon to match that angle.
 - o Use a compass to move the sundial until the tilted gnomon points north.
 - o To secure the gnomon in place at this angle, place your sundial on soft ground and push the end of the gnomon into the ground.



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