

Assignment Discovery Lesson Plan The Future of the Milky Way

Subject

Astronomy/Space

Grade level

9-12

Duration

Two or three class periods

Objectives

Students will

- speculate about the changes that are taking place in our galaxy;
- research the latest ideas on the future of the Milky Way; and
- discuss the consequences of events that may happen in the future.

Materials

- Paper and pencils
- Computer with Internet access
- *The Future of the Milky Way* video and VCR

Procedure

1. Begin the lesson by having a brainstorming session on students' ideas about the future of our galaxy the Milky Way. Do they think the galaxy is changing? If so, what do they think is bringing about these changes? What do students think the galaxy will look like billions of years from now?
2. Next, show the video. Have students pay particular attention to the segments on three main events occurring in the Milky Way: the collision of the Milky Way and the Andromeda Galaxy, the destiny of the sun and other stars in the galaxy, and the development of black holes.
3. Tell students that scientists predict that these events will occur billions of years from now. To learn more about each of these topics and the relationship among them, tell students that they will have time in class to research one of these topics.
4. Divide the class into three groups. Have one group research the collision of galaxies; the second group, changes in stars; and the third group, the development of black holes. The Web sites below provide appropriate information.

Collision of Galaxies

- <http://oposite.stsci.edu/pubinfo/pr/97/34/af1.html>
- http://www.prime-radiant.com/Colliding_Galaxies.html

- http://www.space.com/scienceastronomy/astronomy/big_banger_990921.html

Changes in Stars

- <http://btc.montana.edu/ceres/html/starsbackground.htm>
- <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/astronomy/stars/lifecycle/>
- http://imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/teachers/lifecycles/LC_main_p2.html
- http://www.imsa.edu/edu/astro/astrostudents/96_97_2/t06p1/
- <http://www.d78st.com/life.html>

Black Holes

- <http://archive.ncsa.uiuc.edu/Cyberia/NumRel/LIGO.html>
- http://www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/user/gr/public/bh_intro.html
- http://imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/science/known_12/black_holes.html
- <http://www.eclipse.net/~cmmiller/BH/blkbh.html>

5. After each group has completed its research, have students write a paragraph representing their findings. Tell students to include scientists' latest research, theories, and supporting evidence.
6. Conclude the lesson by bringing students together for a final class discussion. To begin, ask one person from each group to summarize the group's findings. Why do scientists think that these events will take place? What is the relationship among these events? What will the world look like billions of years from now after these events have taken place?

Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

3 points: Students participated actively in class discussions; completed their research carefully and thoroughly; wrote well-developed paragraphs summarizing their ideas on the topic.

2 points: Students participated in class discussions; completed their research; completed paragraphs summarizing their ideas on the topic.

1 point: Students participated little in class discussions had difficulty completing their research; did not complete paragraphs summarizing their ideas on the topic.

Vocabulary:

Andromeda Galaxy

Definition: A spiral galaxy (like our galaxy, the Milky Way) that is our closest neighbor, about 2 million light-years from Earth

Context: Scientists predict that the Andromeda Galaxy will collide with the Milky Way, possibly resulting in the end of life as we know it.

black hole

Definition: A region in space with such strong gravitational force that nothing can escape. Scientists think that black holes form as a result of the death of one or more massive stars.

Context: Astronomers believe that the Milky Way Galaxy has millions of black holes, although pinpointing their locations is extremely difficult.

gravitational force

Definition: The attraction existing between all objects that is responsible for holding together the sun's hot gases, keeping the planets and stars in our galaxy in their orbits

Context: The gravitational force between the Andromeda Galaxy and the Milky Way is pulling them together; the result may be a major collision.

Milky Way

Definition: Our galaxy, which contains the sun; nine planets, including Earth; billions of stars; and numerous other objects

Context: The study of the Milky Way with state-of-the-art radio and infrared telescopes has led scientists to believe that a black hole lies at the center of the galaxy.

red giant

Definition: The time in a star's life cycle when its core is running out of hydrogen and helium; the star cools and becomes less bright.

Context: When our sun becomes a red giant, it will be the beginning of the end of life on Earth as we know it.

stars

Definition: Balls found in space made of hydrogen, helium, oxygen, and carbon.

Stars come in many shapes and sizes; the sun is a medium-sized star.

Context: Stars are born in huge clouds of dust and gas and expand as they grow. Eventually stars explode and collapse, possibly becoming a black hole.

National Standards

The National Science Education Standards, published by the National Academy of Science, provide guidelines for teaching science as well as a coherent vision of what it means to be scientifically literate. Developed by teachers, scientists, science educators, and other experts, the standards for grades K-12 describe what all students in those grades should understand and be able to do in various science categories. To order the Standards, contact the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW, Lockbox 285, Washington, DC 20005; <http://books.nap.edu>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Earth and Space Science: Origin and evolution of the universe

Credit

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