

Space Place column
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Exploring the Baby Universe

What if you could look back in time? Where would you look? Would you check out the beginning of the American Revolution, to see how it all got started? Imagine going all the way back more than 65 million years to see dinosaurs roaming the Earth!

This year, NASA will launch a new telescope into space to look back in time at the Universe. The Galaxy Evolution Explorer (GALEX) will orbit Earth and peer back through 10 billion years of cosmic history. Scientists will use GALEX to learn how baby galaxies change into mature ones, like our Milky Way.

Light travels faster than anything else in the Universe, but still not anywhere near fast enough for us to see events in deep space while they are happening. Light traveling from a star one million light-years away takes a million years to reach Earth. So we can only see that star as it appeared one million years ago. GALEX will look back at many galaxies as they grew up in the Universe to find out how they made their stars.

Imagine asking every student in your school to tell you his or her first word as a baby. Let's say most of the kids said "doggy." What would you know from the answers? You might not learn much about individual kids, but you would know which words all the kids in your school had in common. You might guess that most kids had dogs when they were babies. GALEX will work a bit the same way. It will "ask questions" of lots of young galaxies to find out what they might have in common.

For more information about GALEX and instructions for making your own mobile of beautiful galaxies, go to http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/galex_make1.htm.

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*Caption:
GALEX will look far back in time to see how galaxies began.*

