

NASA Invites You to Name Deep Space 2's Twin Probes

Two brave explorers travel to a mysterious, distant world where no one has gone before and boldly begin to explore. They discover new things about this world. In sharing this information they help to shape human understanding about our Universe.

Who are these intrepid explorers? Alas, so far, they are nameless. But you can help to change that.

The explorers are the twin miniature probes of the Deep Space 2 mission to Mars being conducted by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. In January 1999 the probes, each weighing 5 lbs and encased in a protective shell the size of a basketball, will be launched to Mars riding piggy-back on another spacecraft, the Mars Polar Lander.

Arriving at their destination in December 1999, the two shells will detach themselves from the larger spacecraft and plummet to the ground at a speed of about 450 mph. Upon impact with the Martian surface, the shells will shatter and release the probes which will separate into two parts. The lower part, called the forebody, will plunge into the ground about 3 feet deep. It will remain attached by a data cable to the upper part of the probe, called the aftbody, which will remain on the surface. During the 1 to 3 days the probes are expected to gather data, the forebody of each will send a drill into the surrounding soil to collect a sample. The sample will be brought back into the probe to test for the presence of frozen water. It will send its findings to the aftbody, which will then relay the data back to Earth via the Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft, in orbit around Mars since September 1997.

The Mars probes are attempting a feat never done before in space exploration: they will be the first probes to plunge beneath the surface of an alien world. From markings on the surface of Mars, we can see that water once flowed on the red planet. One of the great mysteries of Mars is where did the water go? If there is any water frozen in the soil beneath the surface at either of the two selected landing sites, the probes will detect it.

The probes are on a mission primarily, though, to test instruments and technologies being used for the first time in space exploration. If they work as expected, they will open the door to understanding celestial bodies within our Solar System in greater detail than we have been able to do in the past. In the future, perhaps 5 to 10 similar probes could be attached to a single spacecraft and released at different locations on a planet. In this way, scientific data can be collected from multiple locations at the same time, allowing us to understand the entire weather "picture" of a planet or its seismic activity.

Like the Mars rover named for Sojourner Truth and the Carl Sagan Memorial Station that explored the surface of Mars during the Pathfinder mission in 1997, these new Mars explorers need names that reflect the importance of this mission.

To enter the contest, choose two people (no longer living) from history, mythology, or fiction; or choose two places or things that are in some way related or associated with each other. Your entry may also include a combination of these, such as a person and a place that are associated with each other. Describe in 100 words or fewer why your entries would make good names for the miniature probes. The names should embody the spirit of exploration, of risk-taking pioneers breaking barriers, or of accomplishment under extreme conditions. Please do not send any acronyms (abbreviations using only the first letter of each word, like "NASA") or names of super heroes, such as "Batman" and "Robin," as suggestions for names.

You might consider these questions when picking the names or writing your essays:

1. Do you know of any historical brother or sister duos, partners, or couples (not living) that worked together to expand the world of science? How did these people contribute to space science, astronomy, or exploration? How do the names you have chosen reflect what will happen with the mission? Do the life stories of the people you have chosen show how they overcame barriers, opened up new frontiers, or explored extreme environments? Did these people push back the frontiers of knowledge or take risks to achieve their goal? Was the goal in itself a great risk?
2. How do the mythological or fictional characters, places, or things symbolize our exploration of the universe?

Contest Rules:

- Anyone is eligible to submit one entry (with two names) naming the twin probes. Non-U.S. citizens are eligible to enter the contest.
- Entries must include an essay of **100 words or fewer** describing why the chosen names best represent the mission. In the case of duplicate names, the judges' selection will be based on the written composition.
- All entries must be **received by April 30, 1999**.
- Entries must be submitted in English.
- All entries become the property of NASA.

Winners will be announced at the end of 1999 and will be contacted via regular mail. Their names will also appear on the Deep Space 2 web site. Winners' names and essays may be featured in news releases and other media materials.

Awards:

- All twenty-five finalists will each receive a beautiful Deep Space 2 poster signed by the project team.