

# Famous Astronomers

**Pythagoras, Greek** – was one of the first people to say the Earth is a sphere, about 2,500 years ago.

**Aristarchus, of Alexandria** – worked out that the Earth revolves around the Sun. That idea took a while to catch on.

**Ptolemy, Greek/Roman** – wrote the oldest surviving works of astronomy about 1,900 years ago. He listed 48 ancient constellations. He also thought the Earth was the centre of the Universe.

**Brahmagupta, Indian** – realised the Moon is lit up by the Sun.

**'Abd-al Rahman al-Sufi, Persian** – wrote a Book of Fixed Stars over a thousand years ago, and was the first astronomer to spot Andromeda. He called it 'A Little Cloud'.

**Nicolaus Copernicus, Polish** – worked out that the Sun is the centre of our Solar System (but kept quiet about it for political reasons).

**Johannes Kepler, German** – realised that the planets travel in an elliptical orbit, not a circular one. Kepler was very good with maths, and used maths to discover a new planet even though he didn't have a telescope.

**Galileo Galilei, Italian** – had a telescope. Ooooh! Discovered 4 moons of Jupiter and Saturn's rings, among other things...

**Isaac Newton, English** – named and described gravity as the force of attraction between objects. Gravity makes things fall downwards on Earth. It also holds moons in orbit around planets, and planets in orbit around stars, and stars together in groups called constellations.

**Albert Einstein, born German** – noticed where Newton had got gravity wrong and redescribed gravity and the nature of space-time. Einstein's work in quantum physics is essential to the maths and physics of modern astronomy.

**Edwin Hubble, North American** – proved the Universe extends beyond the Milky Way.

**George Lemaître, Belgian** – Edgar Allan Poe was the first to write about the idea that the universe began with a giant explosion in his book *Eureka*. George Lemaître was the first astronomer to be credited with the theory of the Big Bang.

**Yuri Gagarin, Russian** – first human in space. He blasted off from Vostok on 12 April 1961. (Laika, Strelka and Belka the dogs had already had a go in the 1950s.)

**Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, North American** – crew of Apollo 11, blasted off 20 July 1969. Neil Armstrong was the first person to walk on the Moon, Buzz Aldrin the second, and Michael Collins kept the spaceship ready for the others to return to.

**Hubble telescope** (named after Edwin Hubble, North American). It went into space in 1990 and takes photographs of objects in distant space.

Check them out at <http://hubblesite.org/images/gallery>

\*For more facts, we recommend the excellent and very funny book, *The Comic Strip History of Space*, by Sally Kindberg and Tracey Turner.