

What Is Earth Science?

KEY IDEAS

As you read this section, keep these questions in mind:

- What are two cultures that contributed to modern science?
- What are the four main branches of Earth science?
- How do Earth scientists help us understand the world?

How Did Ancient People Study Earth?

People have wondered about natural events on Earth for thousands of years. They felt earthquakes shake the ground, saw volcanoes erupt, and watched eclipses darken the sky.

Some people created myths or stories to explain how these events happened. Others carefully watched and studied these events. They tried to learn what caused the events. Each time someone discovered a possible cause, it helped people develop explanations for other events.

The table below shows some historical observations that were important to the study of Earth.

Approximate Date	Development
780 BCE	People in China began to keep records about earthquakes.
200 BCE	Ancient Greeks gathered and recorded information about rocks and minerals.
300–900 CE	Ancient Maya watched the moon and recorded information about eclipses.
1600s	The microscope was invented.
1700s	The telescope was invented.

For a long time, people could use only their unaided eyes to study Earth and space. After the telescope and microscope were invented, people could observe objects and events more clearly. For example, Galileo used a telescope to see Jupiter's moons.

Today, scientists continue to study the natural world. **Earth science** is the study of Earth and the universe around it. Earth scientists use observations and experiments to find the causes of events in nature. 

READING TOOLBOX

Organize As you read this section, make a spider map that identifies the major branches of Earth science. Add details about each branch, such as what it focuses on and how knowledge from that branch can be helpful to society.

**READING CHECK**

1. **Define** What is Earth science?

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