

NAMING PLANET X



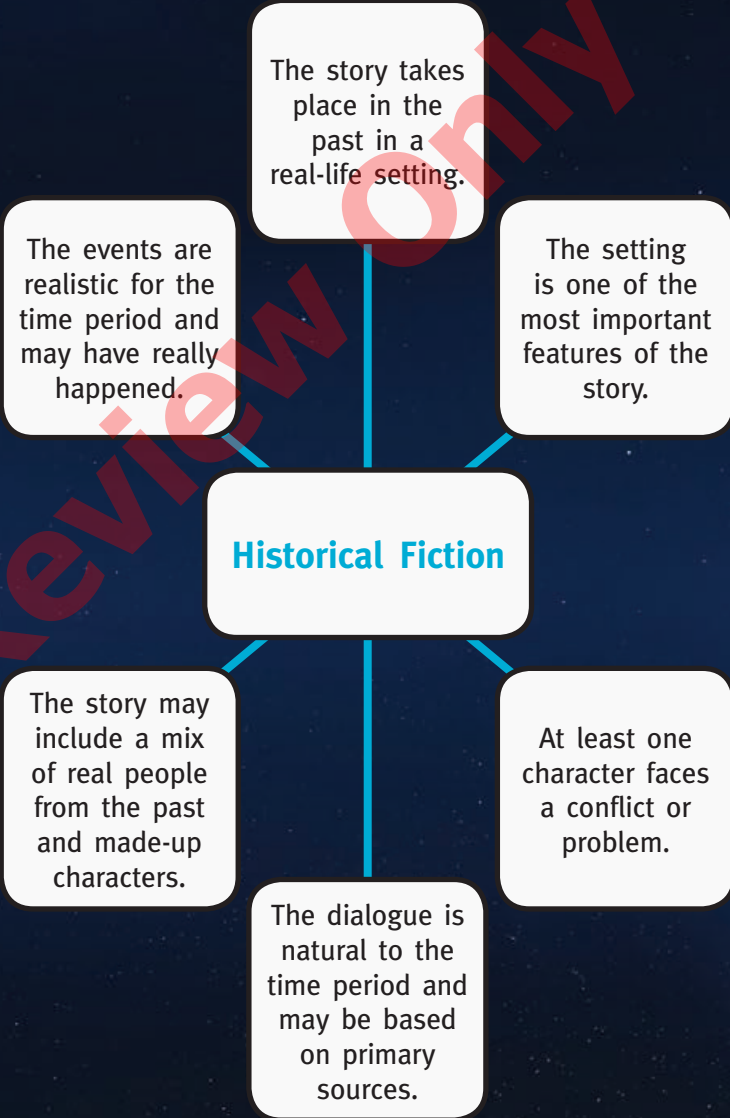
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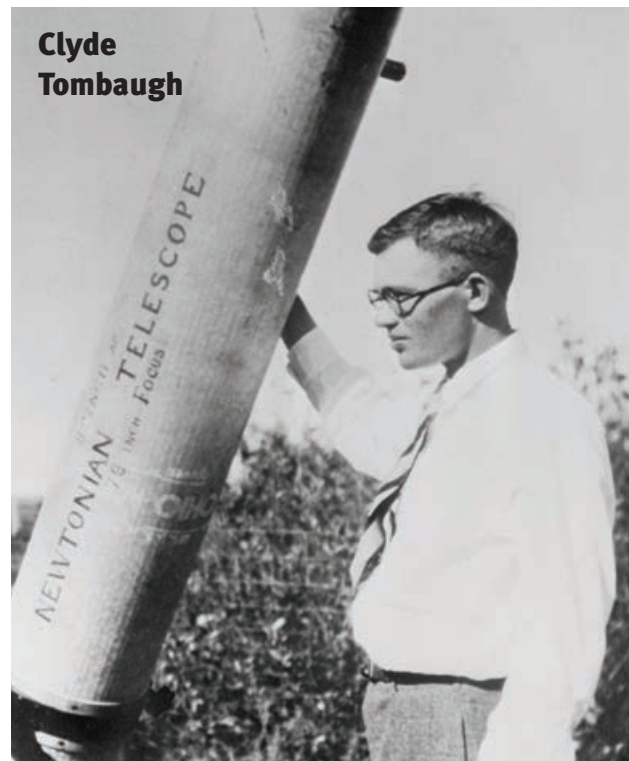
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Planet X

In April 1929, twenty-four-year-old Clyde Tombaugh went to work at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. His job was to continue the work started by Percival Lowell to look for a ninth planet. Lowell noticed vibrations in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune. He believed that these were caused by the gravitational pull of a mysterious planet.

In February 1930, after months of hard work, Clyde Tombaugh made a remarkable discovery—he found Planet X. However, Tombaugh and the other scientists could not think of a proper name for the new planet. So its name remained Planet X. People from all over the world sent in names, but none sounded right. In March 1930, an eleven-year-old British girl named Venetia Burney suggested the name Pluto.



Venetia thought that the planet should be named after a Greek or Roman god. **Astronomers** liked the name Pluto. In May 1930, they officially named the ninth planet Pluto.

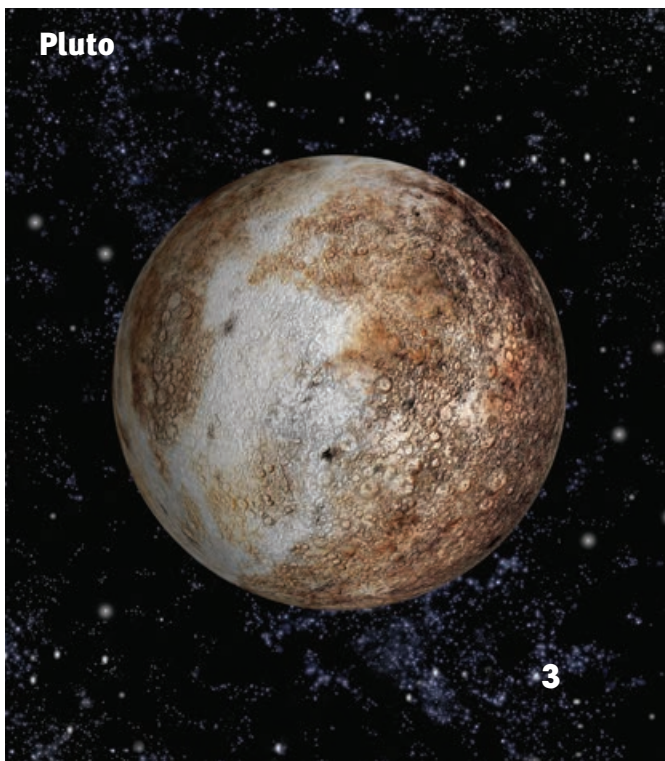
Venetia later became a math teacher and led a quiet life. However, in 1987 she became famous again. Astronomers had found a new **asteroid** and named it after her. It was called 6235 Burney.

In 2006, astronomers decided that Pluto was actually a dwarf planet. This meant that it was smaller than the other planets. It doesn't mean that the discovery was any less important in history. Read about how this unusual scientific discovery happened.

Venetia Burney



Pluto



A New Discovery

Clyde felt lucky. He had just been hired as an assistant at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. This was his first day on the job and he was excited! He would be studying the stars and the planets with the best astronomers in the United States. Standing in the main room of the observatory, Clyde stared at the largest telescope he had ever seen.

“Are you Clyde?” asked a man in the doorway. He was holding a pile of papers.



“Yes,” replied Clyde nervously.

“I’m Carl Lampland. These papers include all the information we have about Planet X.” The stack of papers fell on the desk with a thud.

“Do you know what my duties will be?” asked Clyde.

“Slipher will explain that to you,” replied Carl. “He’ll be here any minute. Good luck.” Carl chuckled as he headed for the door and disappeared down the hall.

Standing there alone, Clyde shuffled back to the telescope and gently looked through its **eyepiece**. Just then, Clyde heard loud footsteps coming towards him.

“You must be Clyde,” he heard a deep voice say. “Welcome. I’m Dr. Slipher, the director of the observatory,” the man said, marching over to shake Clyde’s hand.



“What did you see in the telescope?” asked Dr. Slipher.

“The moon, sir. Up close. It’s an amazing sight!” Clyde said, smiling.

“Well, we’re hoping you’ll see a lot farther than the moon. You have a big job ahead of you,” said the doctor.

Dr. Slipher sat in the armchair that was placed in front of the telescope.

“What am I looking for?” asked Clyde.

“Why, Planet X, of course,” exclaimed Dr. Slipher. “We believe it’s out there. However, Lampland and the others have given up the search.”



A new planet? Clyde thought to himself. *This would be an amazing discovery.*

“You’ll take pictures with this. It’s like a huge camera,” said Dr. Slipher while gently moving the giant instrument. “Look through the lens and press this button. You’ll get the clearest photos you’ve ever seen.”

“Then, you’ll compare the photos with this,” continued the doctor.

He pointed to a rather odd-looking machine that had two plates on which to place the photos. Clyde’s task was to take pictures of the same part of the sky on one night. Then, he’d wait a few days and take the pictures again.

“If the objects in the sky stay in the same spot, they’re stars. If one is in a different spot, then it could be the sign of a new planet,” explained Dr. Slipher.

Clyde knew that stars remain in the same positions over time. Planets travel across the sky. As planets orbit the sun, their positions change night after night.

Months went by and eventually the new year turned. Clyde became frustrated with his work. He checked the calendar next to his desk.

“It’s already February 18, and I feel like I’ve made no progress,” he said to his coworker.

Clyde looked at a few pictures he took from that morning. He traced his finger over the night sky. Suddenly, something strange caught his eye. He picked up the photo and raced into Dr. Slipher’s office.

“Doctor, I think I’ve found Planet X!” he said out of breath.

The doctor carefully checked the images in front of him. It felt like forever to Clyde. Finally, Dr. Slipher slowly gazed up. “It seems you have!” he shouted. “You have!”

Clyde smiled brightly. He imagined a huge ceremony where other astronomers would thank him for his hard work. Maybe even a statue of himself would be built to honor him.

Dr. Slipher stood up from his desk. “And since you found it, you get to name it.”



“Wait a second,” shouted a coworker. “Just because he found it doesn’t mean he can name it.”

“Yeah. We’re a team,” said another. “How about the name Lowell in honor of the observatory?”

The **debate** continued as the team yelled out other names. On March 13, they announced the discovery of Planet X to the newspapers. The world waited anxiously to find out what the new planet would be called.