

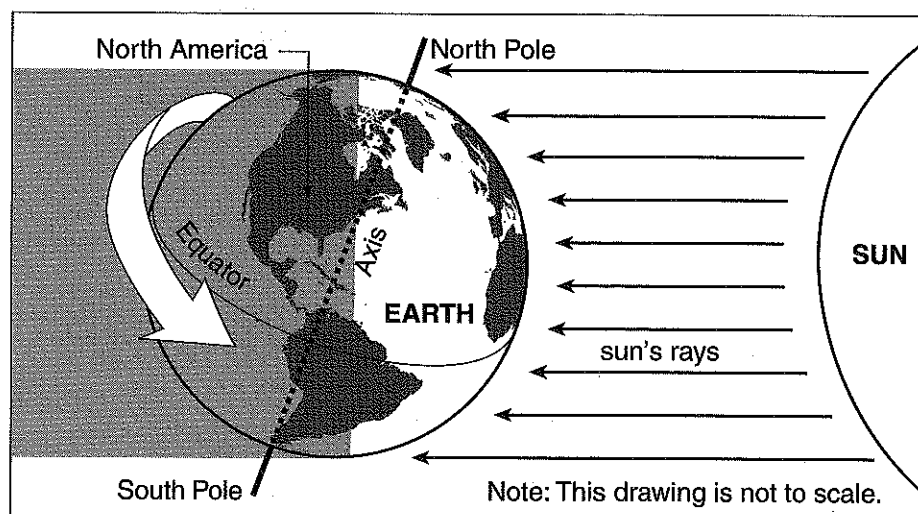
Hang On for the Ride!

by Jim Bartlett

Although you might feel as if you are firmly planted in one place, you are moving every second of your life. You can't feel it, but each day you move thousands of miles through space.

Earth actually has two kinds of motion: rotation and revolution. To understand rotation, imagine a line from the North Pole to the South Pole through the center of the Earth. This line is called Earth's axis. Earth rotates, or spins, on its axis once every 24 hours. To picture this spinning motion, think about a basketball spinning very slowly on the tip of a person's finger.

As Earth spins one full turn, we experience day and night. So, when Kentucky faces the Sun, it is daytime here and nighttime in China—on the opposite side of the world. When Kentucky is turned away from the Sun, it is nighttime here and daytime in China. Day after day, Earth's rotation never stops. This also is true for the other planets, which spin just as Earth does.



At the same time, our spinning planet travels in a long loop around the sun. Earth makes one revolution (trip around the sun) each year. To understand revolution, think about a merry-go-round. Imagine that the center of the merry-go-round is the sun. Now imagine that you are Earth, sitting on a merry-go-round horse, circling around the sun. The other horses on the merry-go-round are the other planets, some closer to the sun than you are, some farther away. Unlike a merry-go-round, however, the planets travel around the sun at different speeds, and none of them follow the same path.

So, if you can't sit still, don't worry. No one is sitting still, night or day. We're all on a wonderful high-speed ride around the solar system. Hang on!