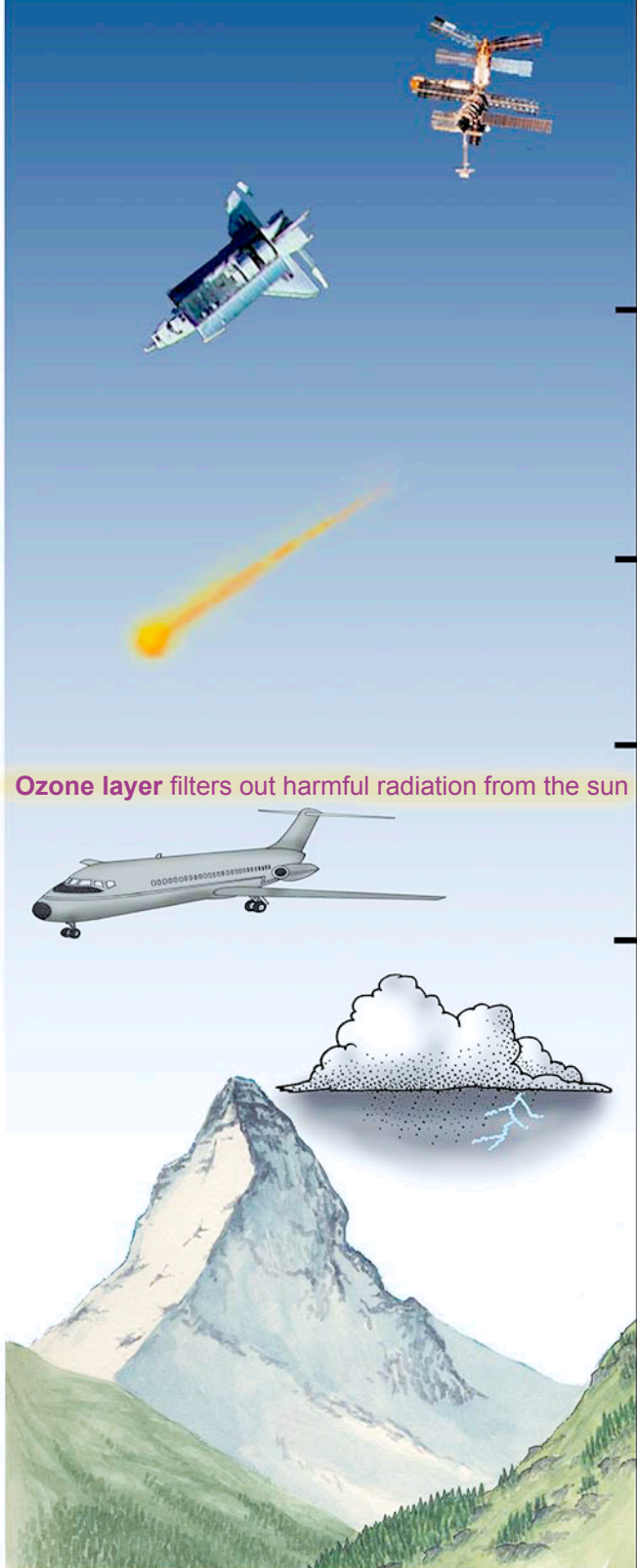


The Atmosphere

surrounds the Earth in gaseous layers held in place by gravity.



The atmosphere is made up of about 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen and 1% carbon dioxide and other gases, including water vapor.

Layers of the Atmosphere:

The **exosphere** is the outer boundary of Earth's atmosphere. It reaches to about 6,200 miles (1,000 km) above the Earth. This is the level of the atmosphere where our satellites orbit the earth.

The **thermosphere** is next, in the outer atmosphere, at 125 miles (200km) above the Earth's surface. This is where the space shuttles orbited the Earth.

The **mesosphere** is 50 miles (80km) above the Earth's surface. This layer stops most meteors as they fly toward Earth burning up as "shooting stars."

The **stratosphere** is 30 miles (50km) above the Earth's surface. Here the air is calm and commercial airlines fly their planes.

The layer we live in is the **troposphere**. It reaches from the ground up 4-12 miles (6-20 km). This level of the atmosphere is where all weather happens from hurricanes and tornadoes to thunder and lightning.