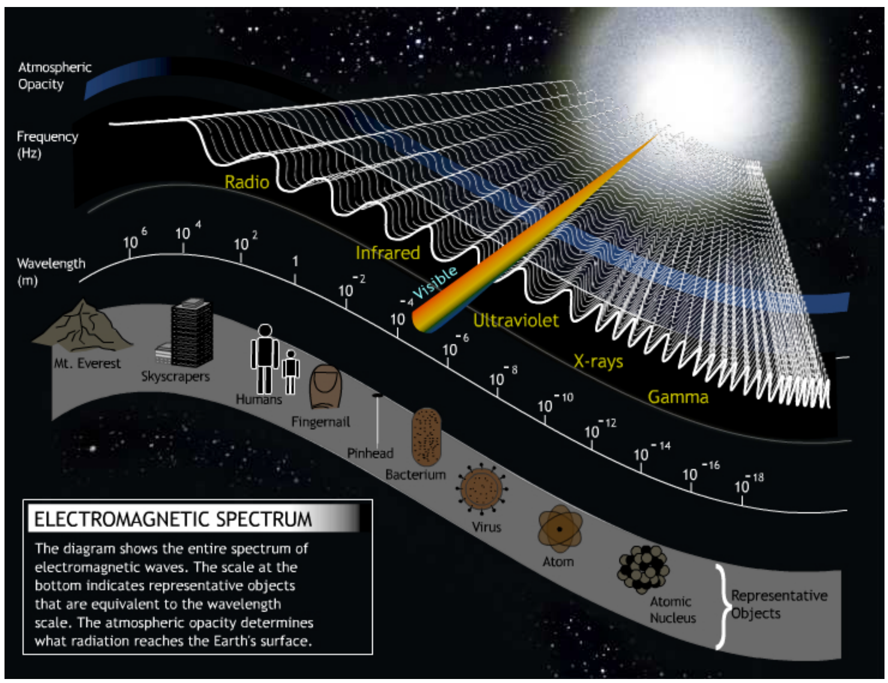
Module 2: Why do we study the Sun?

Activity A: The Sun & EM Spectrum

Overview

The Sun provides Earth with energy to enable and sustain life on our planet. This light energy is called electromagnetic radiation, which is a combination of perpendicular electric and magnetic fields. Electromagnetic radiation is divided into seven different wavebands according to the wavelength of energy. For example, a very long wavelength of electromagnetic radiation is in the "radio waves" waveband of the Electromagnetic (EM) Spectrum, and very short wavelength radiation is in the "gamma radiation" waveband of the EM Spectrum.



Images: NASA

One section of electromagnetic radiation is called visible light because it is in the specific waveband that our eyes can see. Light energy (electromagnetic radiation) from the Sun is contained in "packets" called photons. Photons are released from the Sun and travel to Earth, and beyond, at the speed of light. The speed of light travels at approximately 186,000 miles/second or 300,000 km/s, which so far is the fastest known speed in the universe. If you could travel at the speed of light you'd be able to travel more than seven times around the equator of the Earth in one second - that's FAST!

NASA'S Solar Dynamic Observatory (SDO) is enabling scientists to gain tremendous knowledge of the source of the Sun's energy and how that energy is stored and released by the corona and transition region (the region between the corona and chromosphere) of the Sun's atmosphere. Bursts of solar energy can affect our technology that relies on satellite communications such as cell phone service, weather forecasting, GPS, and ATMs.

• AIA – Atmospheric Imaging Assembly
• EVE – Extreme Ultraviolet Variability Experiment

There are three key instruments onboard SDO that are researching the Sun in amazing detail - AIA, EVE, and HMI. Two of these instruments, AIA and EVE, measure the EM radiation of the Sun. The main goal of SDO's AIA research is to greatly improve our understanding of the activity within the Sun's atmosphere that drives space weather and affects planets, especially Earth. A main objective of SDO's EVE research is to measure and better understand the extreme ultraviolet output from the Sun on different timescales - in seconds due to solar flares, in days due to the Sun's rotation, and in years due to the solar cycle. Also, EVE gives insight as to how the Sun's EUV output influences Earth's climate and near-Earth space environment. View these two video clips to learn how NASA's SDO is using the Electromagnetic Spectrum to increase our knowledge of the Sun at light-speed!

Team Goal

Your goal is to learn about the Electromagnetic Spectrum and understand how SDO uses the EM Spectrum to study and learn about the Sun in greater detail.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- "Helioviewer Solar Exploration" data sheet(s)
- Pencil

Engage & Explore!

1. BUILD Knowledge:

SDO EM Instruments

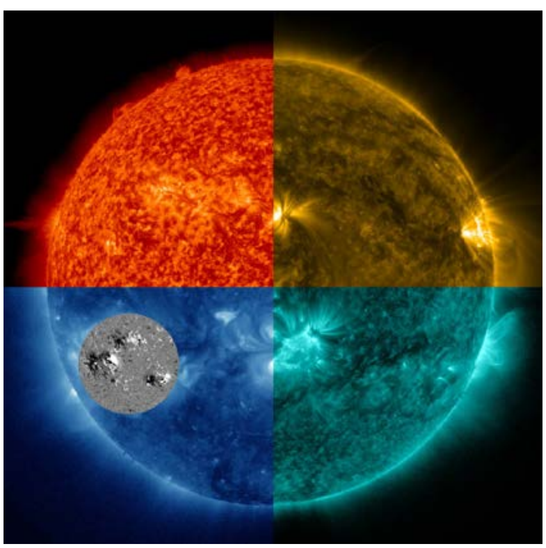


Image: NASA

Light of different wavelengths reaches different parts of the Earth's atmosphere. Visible light and infrared radiation reach Earth's surface, warming our planet to livable conditions. Most ultraviolet radiation wavelengths are absorbed at higher altitudes in our atmosphere. Extreme ultraviolet (EUV) and some X-ray radiation (wavelengths less than 120 nm) are absorbed by the upper atmosphere above 100 km (60 miles). Thankfully, EUV radiation is completely absorbed by Earth's atmosphere but it is very dangerous to people and electronics in space.

AIA: Lockheed Martin Solar Astrophysics Laboratory

EVE: University of Colorado Boulder Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics

Images: NASA

[SDO AIA Video]
[SDO EVE Video]

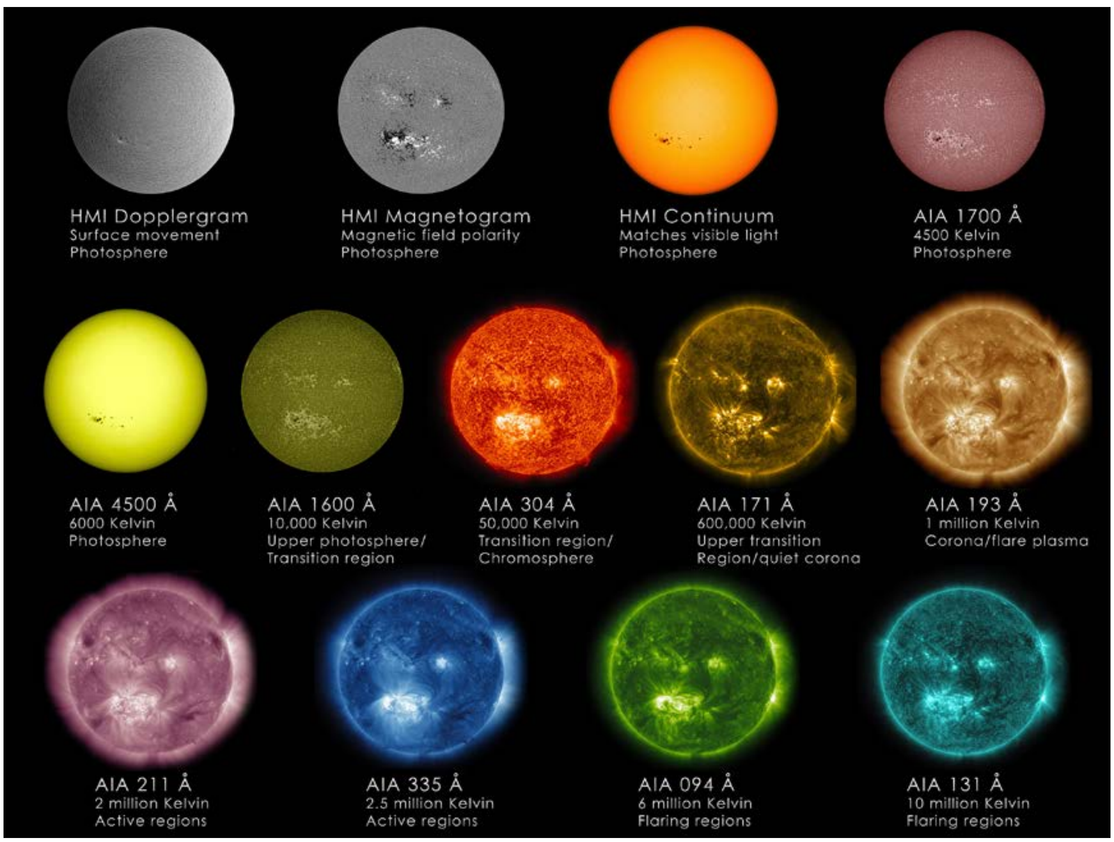


Image: NASA

SDO AIA EM Spectrum Wavelengths:
Measured in Angstroms Å (10^{-10} m, one ten-billionth of a meter)

- ☐ 094 (Soft X-ray)
- ☐ 131(EUV Light)
- ☐ 171 (EUV Light)
- ☐ 193 (EUV Light)
- ☐ 211 (EUV Light)
- ☐ 304 (EUV Light)
- ☐ 335 (EUV Light)
- ☐ 1600 (UV Light)
- ☐ 1700 (UV Light)
- ☐ 4500 (Visible Light)

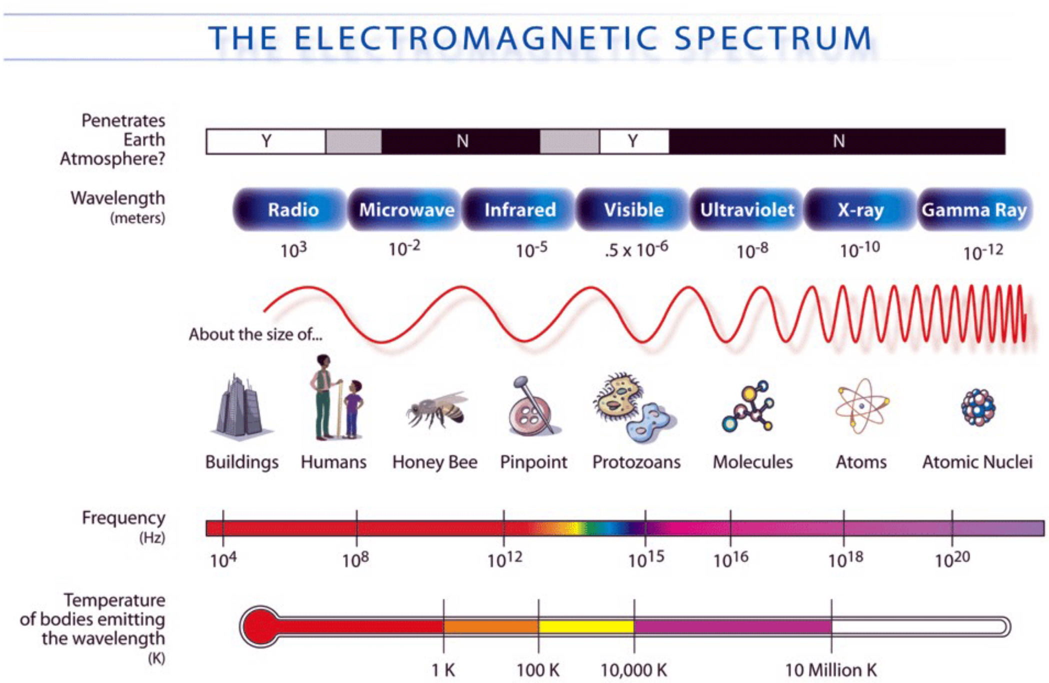
2. APPLY Learning:

EM Spectrum

How are the different wavelengths of the Electromagnetic Spectrum formed? As the temperature of an object increases its EM wavelength decreases, which means the hotter an object is, the shorter the wavelength of radiation it gives off. Take NASA's tour of the EM Spectrum by clicking the link below. As you take your tour, research and record details about the different wavelengths that make up the EM Spectrum on the "What's the Wavelength" interactive foldable:
EM Spectrum Tour

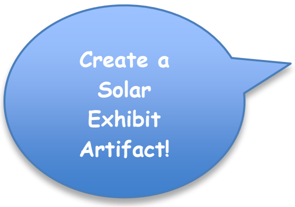
Now, reinforce your learning of the Sun and the Electromagnetic Spectrum by watching the NOVA Sun Lab video link below. As you watch the video, complete and check your answers on the "What's the Wavelength" worksheet and interactive foldable for accuracy. Remember, this foldable is an artifact for your team's Module 4 SDO Exploration Museum 3-D Solar Exhibit!
The Sun & EM Spectrum Video

Image: NASA



Longer Wavelength
Lower Frequency
Lower Energy

Shorter Wavelength
Higher Frequency
Higher Energy



3. DEMONSTRATE Ability:

Helioviewer Solar Exploration!

The Sun's surface temperature is about 6000 ^{o}C and emits most of its radiation in wavelengths between 300 - 600 nanometers, which is in the Ultraviolet and Visible Light range. SDO takes a full-disk image of the Sun in 10 different EM wavelengths every 10 seconds and these images are 10 times clearer and sharper than HD. SDO then transmits this vast amount of information back to Earth, which is equivalent to downloading half a million iTunes songs everyday! Solar scientists around the world are very excited about the incredible amount of extremely detailed information that SDO provides, which you get to use first-hand in this module activity.

Helioviewer is an amazing, inter-active website that provides your team with access to high-tech, near real-time images and data of the Sun. Helioviewer is designed to let your team choose your own data sets, timeframe, and solar features to observe. For example, a team can track a 28-day cycle (one rotation) of the Sun to observe its sunspots and magnetic fields and download photos and a movie of the actual event! The SDO space project is collecting information on:

- Measurements of the Sun’s irradiance (the Sun’s energy output) over a broad range of EM Spectrum wavelengths that represent a wide range of energies (EVE)
- Images of the variation in radiance among the Sun’s different magnetic features (AIA)
- An understanding of how the Sun’s magnetic fields are created and change (AIA & HMI)
- Measurements of the origin of the Sun’s energy (HMI)

Watch the tutorial video to learn how to use the amazing Helioviewer tool to view and analyze SDO data in various EM wavelengths (if you need more information, click on the user guide links below):
How to use the Helioviewer Tutorial
Helioviewer User Guide
Helioviewer User Guide printable version

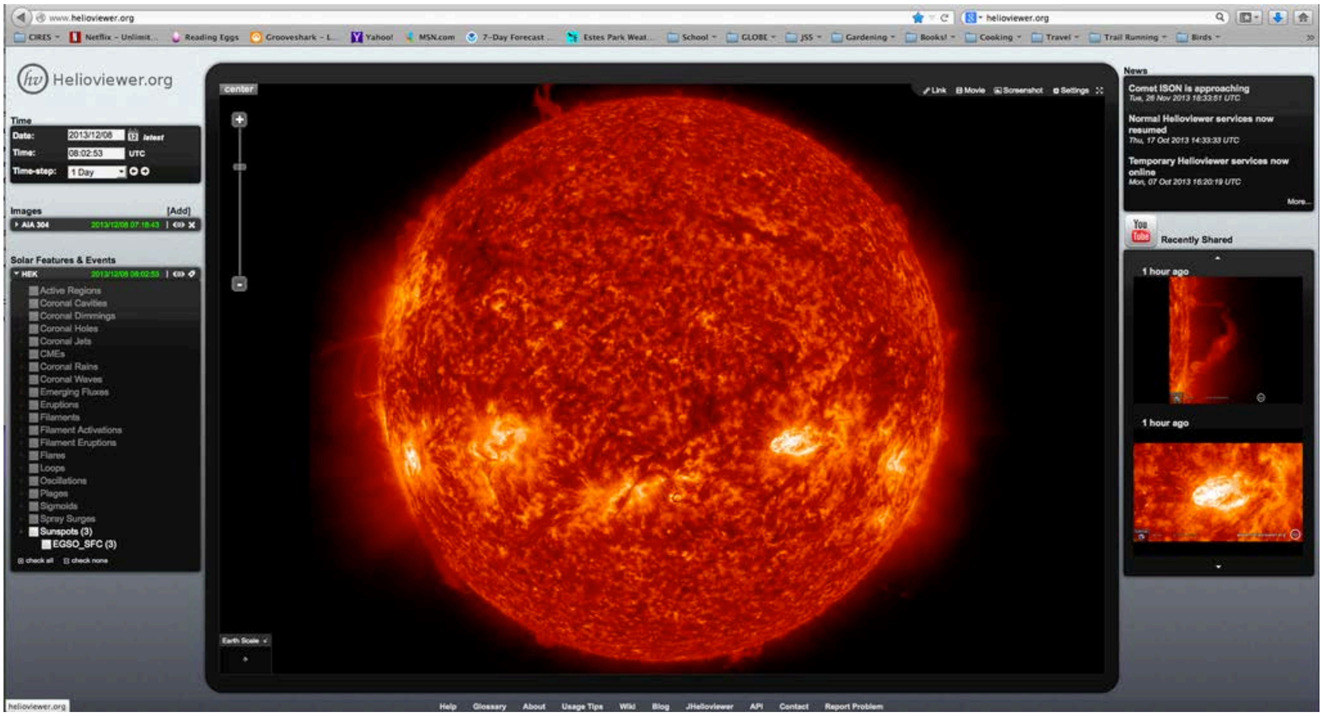


Image: Helioviewer.org

After your team views the Helioviewer tutorial, select your team's "Helioviewer Solar Exploration" topic. Each topic follows the same basic instructions for using the Helioviewer.org website selections (located on the left side of webpage):

1. "Time" box: Choose a start date; use the calendar to click a date (selecting a time is not necessary).
2. Choose the time-step (1-day, 1-week, or 28-days) that fits your team's topic choice.
3. "Images" box: Observatory: SDO
4. Instrument: AIA for EM Spectrum images or HMI for magnetism images
5. Detector: Select the same choice as #4 (AIA or HMI)
6. Measurement: Select the AIA wavelength number listed in the investigation instructions below, for HMI choose "magnetogram".

Helioviewer Solar Exploration Topics

Select one topic and follow its instructions. Complete the required information on the “SDO Helioviewer Solar Exploration Data Sheet” activity sheet.

A. Sunspot Sleuths Helioviewer Activity:
Use the visible light spectrum to identify and track the motion of sunspots on the Sun’s surface for one week. Where are most sunspots located? Sunspots do not move but appear to do so due to the rotation of the Sun. Which direction does the Sun rotate? What changes, if any, do you observe in the size, shape, and number of sunspots over a one-week period? Enter these selections into the online Helioviewer fields and also write them on your team’s Helioviewer Solar Exploration Data Sheet:

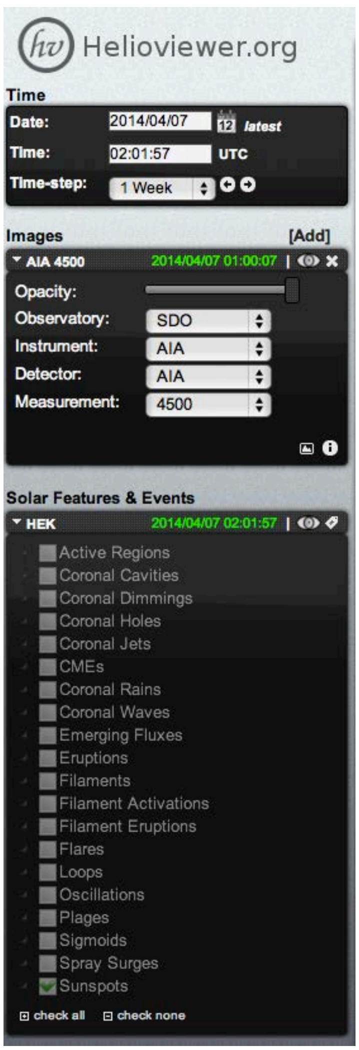
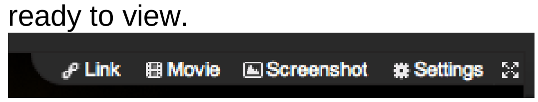


Image: Helioviewer.org

1. In the “Time” box choose the Date: Select a start date from the calendar (make sure it is at least 7 days earlier than today’s date).
2. Time-step: “1-week”
3. In the “Images” box choose Observatory: “SDO”
4. Instrument: “AIA”
5. Detector: “AIA”
6. Measurement: “4500”
7. In the “Solar Features & Events” box check only “Sunspots” (keep the “eye” and “tag” logo unchecked).
8. Next, make a photo gallery or movie. For a photo gallery, click on the “Screenshot” tab and choose “Full Viewport”. Repeat these steps for six additional days. For a movie, click on the “Movie” tab and choose “Full Viewport”. There will be a message indicating how long it will take to process the movie and a notice will pop up on screen when your SDO movie is ready to view.



9. Download and save your images or movie for your team’s Solar Module 4 Living Museum & 3-D Solar Exhibit!

B. [Solar Explosions Helioviewer Activity](#):
The Sun rotates once every 27 days along its equator, which is faster than the 31-day rotation at the Sun's poles. Create a movie of a "day" on the Sun. Describe any major events that you observe happening on the Sun's surface – CMEs (coronal mass ejections) or flares (these are the two causes of space weather on Earth), sunspots, loops, etc. Is there an ordered pattern in the occurrence of the solar features and events? Enter these selections into the online Helioviewer fields and also write them on your team's Helioviewer Solar Exploration Data Sheet:

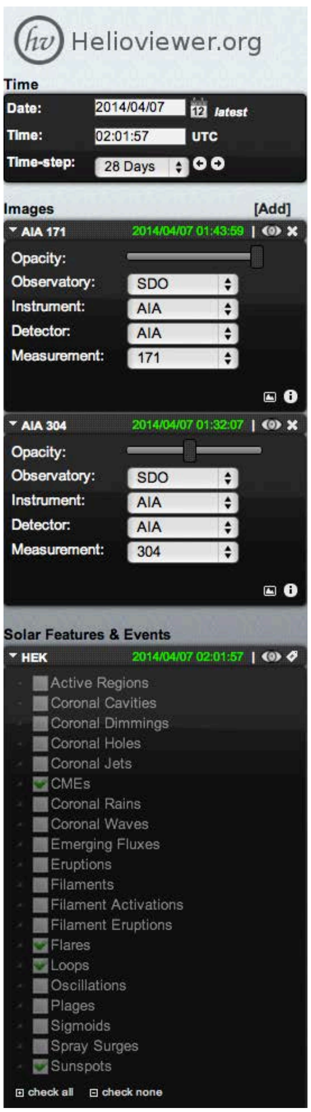
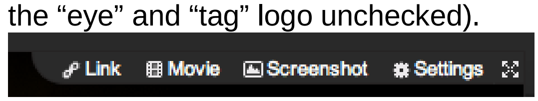


Image: Helioviewer.org

1. In the "Time" box choose the Date: Select a start date from the calendar (make sure it is at least 28 days earlier than today's date).
2. Time-step: "28-days"
3. In the "Images" box choose Observatory: "SDO"
4. Instrument: "AIA"
5. Detector: "AIA"
6. Measurement: "171"
7. Click the "Add" button at the top right to select another image to overlay and again select Observatory: "SDO", Instrument: "AIA", Detector: "AIA", Measurement: "304".
8. In the "Solar Features & Events" box check up to four features & events "CMEs", "Flares", plus two other features & events of your choice (keep the "eye" and "tag" logo unchecked).



9. Click on the "Movie" tab and choose "Full Viewport". There will be a message indicating how long it will take to process the movie and a notice will pop up on screen when your SDO movie is ready to view.
10. Download and save your movie for your Solar Module 4 Living Museum & 3-D Solar Exhibit!

C. [Mag-light Mystery Helioviewer Activity](#):
Identify an SDO image of the Sun with multiple sunspot regions, then overlay the image with an HMI image (solar magnetic activity). What do you notice about the location of sunspots on the Sun's surface in relation to the locations on the Sun with high levels of magnetic activity? Enter these selections into the online Helioviewer fields and also write them on your team's Helioviewer Solar Exploration Data Sheet:

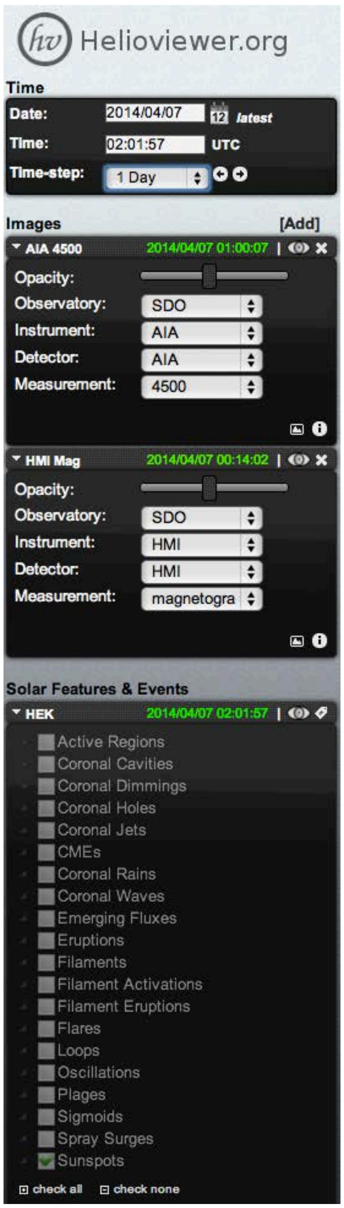
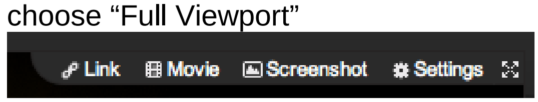


Image: Helioviewer.org

1. In the "Time" box choose the Date: select a start date from the calendar.
2. Time-step: "1-day"
3. In the "Images" box choose Observatory: "SDO"
4. Instrument: "AIA"
5. Detector: "AIA", Measurement:" 4500"
6. Click the "Add" button at the top right to select another image to overlay.
7. Again select Observatory: "SDO", Instrument: "HMI", Detector: "HMI", Measurement: "magnetogram".
8. In the "Solar Features & Events" box check only "Sunspots" (keep the "eye" and "tag" logo unchecked).
9. Then click on the "Screenshot" tab and choose "Full Viewport"



10. Download and save your images for your Solar Module 4 Living Museum & 3-D Solar Exhibit!
11. Repeat these steps for six more days. Once your team has chosen a topic, click on the link below to access the Helioviewer website to start your team's "Helioviewer Solar Exploration"! As a team, complete the online Helioviewer topic activity and data sheet together. Remember to save and download your Helioviewer images and/or movie for use in your Module 4 SDO Exploration Museum 3-D Solar Exhibit as an artifact!

Excellent effort exploring the EM Spectrum of the Sun!